PROBLEMS OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE
IN THE THOUGHT OF
ALBRECHT RITSCHL, WILLIAM JAMES, AND H. RICHARD NIEBUHR

by

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ABSTRACT

"PROBLEMS OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE IN THE THOUGHT OF ALBRECHT RITSCHL, WILLIAM JAMES, AND H. RICHARD NIEBUHR"

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The alleged noetic character of much religious experience requires inquiry into the epistemological methods and status of faith-statements. In contrast to the more traditional authoritarian, rationalistic, empirical, or intuitive analyses stands a broad and undefined approach which emphasizes the role of will in the gaining of religious knowledge. Although technically unrelated to a distinct "school," Albrecht Ritschl, William James, and H. Richard Niebuhr represent three, varying illustrations of the contention that religious "judgment" is clearly foundational to religious "knowledge."

Albrecht Ritschl's concept of the religious "value-judgment" proceeds from his earlier rejection of rationalism's efforts to prove the existence of God. The concept is founded on the argument that while "spirit" is an experienced reality, it is quite impossible for reason and that two forms of knowledge, "theoretic" (descriptive) and "religious" (valuational), must thus be possible. The concept is also supported by a theory of religion which contends that a valuational assertion of deity is required by the transcendent yearnings of the

human spirit caught up in the finite world of nature. Thirdly, the concept is supported by a brief reference to a "Lotzean" metaphysic expressing confidence in the reality of the phenomenal world. In criticism, the author suggests that while the concept of the "value-judgment" compels religious knowledge to begin with the immediate and the personal, Ritschl's exposition of it is burdened with contradictions which rob it of force. The various supporting arguments are hardly co-ordinate and are not argued consistently throughout. It is suggested that the precise noetic quality of the "value-judgment" is never made entirely clear and, finally, that Ritschl's theory of religion implies a strong anthropocentrism which is inadequate to religious experience.

William James's concept of "the will to believe" follows his analysis of traditional, rationalistic theories of religious knowledge as logically unacceptable, unable to meet the challenge of Darwinism, unable to describe the purposive character of knowledge, and morally objectionable. In James's view, the "faith-ladder" is a pragmatic supplement made necessary by the limits of empiricism. The author suggests that while many of the traditional criticisms of "the will to believe" are founded on a basic misunderstanding of James's purpose, the underlying pragmatism requires, in the last analysis, that "beliefs" stand merely as "justifiably cherished hypotheses" and that an assertion of their "truth" is quite misleading. It is also suggested that, in James's approach, the crucial question remains essentially untreated, viz., the character of the "moral impulses" which justify belief.

H. Richard Niebuhr's understanding of "revelation" proceeds from his criticism of traditional apologetics as "defensive" and his acceptance of historical relativism. Revelation may be taken as a center of value which fills the personal life with meaning and, as the final intelligibility, makes the particulars of experience intelligible; as such, it is confessional and not apologetic in nature. In criticism, the author suggests that in several crucial passages Niebuhr implies that revelation can be validated, or at least that revelation can be distinguished from "false idolatry." It is suggested that such an implication is incompatible with a thorough historical relativism and with the description of the nature of revelation.

In general, the description of religious knowledge as thoroughly valuational requires a rigorous separation of "theoretic" and "religious" knowledge and would seem to imply a relativism of religious knowledge. While such an analysis may raise many questions, it does remain highly faithful to the elements of religious experience. However, the author asks whether this permits much noetic content for faith and whether the analysis is able to account for observed change in faith ("religious" and "theoretic" knowledge being held separate).

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PREFACE

William James once wrote of that vast network of acquaintanceship whereby, through one's acquaintances and the acquaintances of those acquaintances, one is ultimately joined in some sort of relationship with the Empress of China and the Chief of the African Pygmies. At no time is the truth of this little insight more clear than when one undertakes to acknowledge the contributions of one's friends, advisers and colleagues in the formation of a doctoral paper. Indeed, a full listing would seem to extend to both China and Africa.

Grateful thanks are due to the librarians and assistants of the Union Theological Seminary Library, the Library of the Yale Divinity School, and the Hood College Library — for many courtesies and much patience. From my former colleagues at Colgate University, particularly Professors Herman A. Brautigam and Joseph W. Mathews, I have received much-needed advice and welcome encouragement. My fellow-candidates in the Columbia University program have served as the backboard for many a strange idea, and it is important to note that the angle of reflection testifies not only to the position of the backboard, but also to the angle of incidence and the spin on the ball. The incisive criticisms of my fellow-students are threaded throughout these chapters and my thinking.

It would be impossible to state the full contribution of my dissertation committee. In the midst of busy schedules, Professors Horace L. Friess, John Dillenberger and Robert M.

Brown have provided scholarly criticism and encouragement beyond measure. The advice of another member of that committee, the late Professor David E. Roberts, will be remembered.

Permission to use materials from The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation, The Will to Believe and Other Essays of Popular Philosophy, and The Meaning of Revelation has been graciously extended by Charles Scribner's Sons, Messrs. Paul R. Reynolds and Son, and The Macmillan Company respectively.

A public word of appreciation is due to my wife, not only for her assistance in the preparation of the final manuscript, but above all for her careful and patient understanding of the meaning of "encouragement."

Finally, if a doctoral paper may have a dedication, I would dedicate mine to those whose appointments, dances and clubs seemed designed solely to keep the chapters from completion, whose obscure and wonderful questions required doctoral research to answer, that is, to those who will probably never read these pages, but for whom, after all, they were written — my students.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Philosophic speculation which is centered about the content of religious experience has always enjoyed a dubious status. There is a sense in which Amos' "The lion has roared; who will not fear?" does not admit of speculative treatment. With few exceptions the articulation of religious experience has been in a language considered basically private, beyond full translation into a broader dialect. Yet, in the West at least, the bulk of religious expression has not only been world-affirming but also concerned that it be related to all areas of life — that religion be, not a divisive, but a unifying force on personality. It is from this interest that religious thinkers have attempted to mediate their insights in terms having as broad application as possible. Whatever the character of the ultimate source of Amos' vision, he was obliged to express that revelation in terms meaningful to the whole life of his audience.

Religious thought is thus caught up in a strange duality: on the one hand, the language of its expression, like that of artistic creativity, must remain sui generis lest the effort at explication rob it of its integrity; yet, on the other hand, if the message of religious experience is to be relevant at all, it must "make sense" in terms not wholly private but meaningful throughout the full range of experience. To some degree at least, the expression of religious thought must be coordinate with, but not subordinate to, the expression of all forms of thought. It is this demand which justifies the translation of the immediacy of religious experience into the proximate terms of philosophic speculation.

The epistemology of religion is one of the more significant areas in which the expression of religious thought must come to terms with the fruits of philosophic speculation. Virtually all of religious expression, including much of mystical literature, claims to be noetic. The prophet, many mystics, and most religious thinkers claim to know something. Whatever else they may supply for emotional exaltation, they assert new information. Whatever else they are, the statements, "Jesus is the Son of God" and "The Tao is like the Uncarved Block," are statements of knowledge, and if it is true that religious expression must be intelligible in more than a private dialect, it would appear important to inquire into the status of these knowledge-statements. A religious community must not only make clear to itself what it knows, but must also be prepared to state to the world how it knows. Religious assertions must be made epistemologically intelligible, but they must be made so in a manner which will not corrupt the independence of their origins.

There are, of course, virtually as many epistemologies of religion as there are men who have attempted to explain the structure of their knowledge of the divine object. Religious knowledge has been presented as the translation of a wholly transcendent Voice on High, as the product of mystical absorption into the Ineffable One, as inductive generalization from experience in the natural world. But through the bulk of its history, as through the history of the more secular epistemology from Plato to Hegel, the epistemology of religion has been dominated by a confidence in reason as the mediator and criterion of religious truth. Indeed, many of the other religious epistemologies may be understood as protests against the abuses or limitation of religious rationalism: the authoritarian prophetic thrusts as protests against reason's unimaginativeness; mystical vision as objection to its categorizing of the divine; empirical theology as complaint against its arbitrary character. All of these have played against the "backboard" of religious rationalism; in attempting to express the character of their apprehension of religious truth, they have first had to come to terms with reason and reason's God.

While these may be the major chords and variations on the theme, there is a minor strain running throughout the history of religious epistemology which provides the possibilities for a Copernican revolution in theory of knowledge by striking at the very roots of the confidence in reason. Prophetic but not wholly dogmatic, personal yet not mystically inexpressible, experiential although perhaps not verifiable, what may be called "valuational theology" — the assertion that decision is prior to argument, will prior to reason — may provide a more exact, yet consistent, analysis of the character of our religious knowledge. In this revolution are contained the possibilities of escape, albeit with risks, from the inadequate and coldly impersonal rationalism which, it can be argued, in seeing religious truth as primarily rational, grounds God in reason, not reason in God.

Clues to the "decisive" character of knowledge can be found in prophetic literature, perhaps in the daimon of Socrates, in Paul, Augustine, Luther and as a minor theme throughout the history of philosophic-religious literature. More recently and more explicitly it can be found, in varying expressions and as a protest against Hegelian rationalism and her children, in the works of Albrecht Ritschl, William James, and H. Richard Niebuhr. Exposition and analysis of the epistemological theories of these three men, their complexities, assets and liabilities, constitute the theme of this paper.

The author does not intend to argue that the selection of Ritschl, James, and Niebuhr constitutes the statement of a single position. In a sense, the selection is quite arbitrary — for no serious effort is here made to group the three into a single "school." Not only are direct lines of influence extremely difficult to establish, but the theories advanced differ considerably. The concepts of "value-judgment," "will to believe," and "commitment" are independent expressions designed to meet varying needs. But it does seem true that there is present in each epistemology what James might have called an "attitude of mind," an unwillingness to rest content with the limitations of the various forms of rationalism and a conviction that in the gainingof knowledge, particularly religious knowledge, the act of valuing plays a legitimate and crucial role. That is to say, the author finds prominently displayed in each of his subjects a venturous spirit willing to explore the noetic status of acts of valuing and that while the expression of this spirit varies among the three its presence in each supplies a broad, if unusual, unity capable of investigation.

The paper aims to inquire into the character of this general approach by means of examination of each of the three men. While attention is focused on the individual studies, in a broader sense the paper seeks the statement of a problem: precisely what is it that is involved in taking valuing as the key to religious knowledge? This would seem to be the issue which, in the last analysis, each author is seeking to treat. The individual chapters, then, attempt by illustration to sharpen the character of that problem in the confidence that exploration of three significant statements of such an approach will go far toward pointing out its general assets and hidden liabilities.

The organization of the major chapters, then, develops from this general orientation. Following a discussion of the historical setting, the second chapter proceeds with a description of Ritschl's critique of rationalism, a statement of the various forms in which he asserted the theory of the "value-judgment," and an analysis of problems which may be found in that theory. The third chapter sets out James's pragmatic and moral objections to rationalism's Absolute, describes the roots and content of his radical concept of the "will to believe," and raises questions concerning the clarity and adequacy of that concept. The fourth chapter is similarly organized: Niebuhr's analysis of "defensive apologetics" and his acceptance of historical relativism; his assertion of revelation within relativism; and a discussion of problems contained in that view. The concluding chapter attempts to state the general character of a few of the assets and difficulties of the broad religious epistemology advanced by Ritschl, James and Niebuhr.

Throughout the writing of this paper, the author's interest has been maintained by the excitement of the effort, by the three men, to catch up both lines of the paradox of religious knowledge. The problem has ever been how to maintain the integrity, the transcendence, of religious knowledge and yet describe it as a fully expressible revelation within history. Whatever difficulties and problems he may also have located, this writer has found the fresh and suggestive beginnings of a reply in the works of Albrecht Ritschl, William James, and H. Richard Niebuhr.

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CHAPTER II

ALBRECHT RITSCHL: THE VALUE-JUDGMENT

At the outset one must concede that Albrecht Ritschl was not a philosopher. This is not deny that his thought has had important philosophic consequences for the modern theological enterprise; to the contrary, it was precisely Ritschl's insistence on the philosophic pre-conditions of theology which established at least half of his reputation. Yet he was largely a stranger to the intricacies of the geography of philosophy, somewhat confused by the general route laid out by the professional pioneers, but convinced that the journey must be undertaken and, ultimately, by one's own compass. That Ritschl was a stranger here is a more adequate explanation of the confusion and contradiction in his writings than the tempting conclusion that he was "hopelessly German."[1]

Similarly in terms of the national reference, Denney noted that "Ritschl says somewhere that he is the most difficult German writer since Kant. Many of his readers will say, Why except Kant? Both are difficult, no doubt; the difference is that where Kant is intricate, Ritschl is opaque."[2] The critic continues with the suggestion that reading Ritschl is like learning to see in the dark. It is just this "groping" character of Ritschl's epistemology which makes it as exciting as autobiography and which also makes analysis so difficult. Orr stated the difficulty as kindly as possible: "Ritschl's thought was always in flux — ever growing, improving upon itself, perfecting itself, as he would say."[3] This is no doubt admirable, yet it does impede the work of analysis. The situation is further complicated when it is recognized that the growth of Ritschlianism was hardly directional and often involved elements of retrogression. Finally, his understanding of his more informed predecessors was often inaccurate or fragmentary, leading the student to expect conclusions which never appear.

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[1] L. Henry Schwab, "A Plea for Ritschl," American Journal of Theology, V (January 1901), 18.

[2] James Denney, "Ritschl in English," Expository Times, XII, No. 3, 136.

In short, one can find, within the space of a very few pages of Justification and Reconciliation, statements of completely contradictory character, implying reasonably important changes in his basic view. The variations between editions are great, at times creating a complete reversal in conclusion. The bulk of these changes could be accounted for in terms of the growing character of Ritschl's thought were it not for the contradictions appearing within each edition. As the more patient critics observe, this major fault has arisen from inadequate revision of the editions — yet one must read the latest edition if one hopes to appreciate the final stages of the growing theology. If so, one discovers in the third edition propositions which can also be found in the first edition, but negated and corrected in the second and elsewhere in the third.[4] In this mass of difficulty there is no incontrovertibly marked line of development which one can interpret with assurance that he is proving faithful to Ritschl's intentions in the revision of the editions. The vestiges of older patterns of thought are so conflictingly prominent in the final edition that one must virtually reconstruct Ritschlianism before he may treat it as an object of criticism. That Ritschl has been described with some justification as a Neo-Kantian, Lotzean, naïve realist, subjective idealist, and vulgar realist testifies to the "indefiniteness and haziness," as well as the "growth," in his thought.

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[3] James Orr, The Ritschlian Theology and the Evangelical Faith (3rd ed.; London, 1905), p. 23.

The criticism of the Ritschlianism which is found in these pages is thus in large measure an analysis of the Ritschlianism constructed here. This may well be true of any effort at commentary, yet it is so prominent in a study of Ritschlianism as to be worthy of note. Unquestionably, isolated sentences or brief passages can be located which confound the Ritschlianism presented and subvert the criticisms offered; unless the entire framework is to be held inadequate, these must be put down as the unrevised remains of an earlier view or as irreconcilable conflicts in the mind of the author. The outline of the Ritschlian theory of knowledge suggested in this chapter is one effort to find a coherent and reasonably consistent pattern which will account for the growth of that theory and the arguments undergirding it.

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[4] Illustrative of this problem are the contradictory passages within and between editions of Justification and Reconciliation which are appended to this chapter.

Ritschl's intellectual biography and the historical setting which nurtured Ritschlianism account in large part for the fluid character of the new theology. Wenley was only partially right when he suggested that Ritschlianism had been simply a reaction against the excesses of later absolute idealism, ecclesiastical dogmatism, and general over-intellectualism.[5] There is in Ritschlianism a genius, at least of formulation of older intuitions if not of totally novel insights, which defies analysis in terms of reaction merely. Yet even novelty must play against an older setting and meet needs articulated by prior failures. The philosophical environment of Ritschlianism had at least three major components which were influential in the determination of the protest: the collapse of Hegelianism; the movement "back to Kant;" and the claims of adolescent science.

RELATIONSHIPS AND THEIR INFLUENCE

In the latter half of the last century the attraction of the Hegelian synthesis had paled considerably under the suspicion that at best it had been a subverter of the Gospel message. If the real is the rational and if the prescriptions of religion are taken as the popularization of the truths of philosophy, the unity achieved in conscious experience is gained only at the expense of the uniqueness of revelation and the genuineness and integrity of religious experience. The irrepressible conviction that there is in religion that which is inaccessible to secular philosophy served in Ritschlianism to vindicate the insights of Schleiermacher over the system of Hegel. It was as if religious men required a half-century to discover their own religiousness and to find that "the view which sees in religion nothing but an imperfect and inferior kind of knowledge does not....stand in need of refutation for any one who knows for himself from within what religion is."[6]

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[5] R. M. Wenley, Contemporary Theology and Theism (New York, 1897), p. 116.

The impulse against Hegelianism turned toward the last sure ground before absolute idealism, viz., Kant's critical philosophy. "'Back to Kant' became the accepted formula of a not uninfluential school of thought, — of whom Cohen is perhaps the chief or at least the most convinced prophet, — a school which sought to show that Kant had drawn, once for all, the true boundary lines between the spheres of rational faith and experience, and had thus permanently reconciled them with each other."[7] It would be a mistake to argue that Ritschl agreed to the eternal permanence of the Kantian solution; yet it does remain that it was to the professor of Königsberg that he turned in the organization of the epistemological problem and that the Kantian diagnosis of pure and practical reason became the general ground for Ritschl's distinction between theoretical knowledge and knowledge by value-judgment. Stählin, foremost among the critics concerned with the origins of Ritschlianism, stated the Neo-Kantian character of his thought in bold outline:

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[6] C. C. J. Webb, God and Personality, p. 158, as cited in John Baillie, The Interpretation of Religion (New York, 1928), p. 201.

[7] Edward Caird, "Christianity and the Historical Christ," The New World, VI, No. 21, 2.

> "Restriction of knowledge to the phenomenal, and separation of religious knowledge from theoretical or world-knowledge: such is the two-fold methodical principle by which the character of Ritschl's theology is determined. By this it proves itself *ipso facto* to be a form of Neo-Kantism."[8]

It is somewhat difficult to demonstrate from Ritschl's own writings that he was pre-eminently concerned with the encroachment of science in the traditional realms of theology. Virtually to a man his reviewers pictured his epistemology as a bulwark against "that tendency of mind, which devotion to science often nourishes and fosters, to apply the category of causality and the principle of the uniformity of nature to all objects of knowledge, and to deny reality to all events which cannot be explained by this category, or subordinated to this principle."[9] The most prominent reference in Ritschl's works to this defense against the excessive claims of science is his quarrel with the materialism of Strauss' "monstrous world-machine." His argument against Strauss, *viz.*, that any adequate world-view must set out man's genuine claim to spiritual supremacy over nature, is also one of the two principal props for his theory of value-judgments.[10] Whatever the conscious role of the fear of unlimited science in Ritschl's own thinking, the results of that thinking were grasped, by an age oppressed by such a fear, as guaranteeing an inviolable realm of knowledge for theology.[11] In view of the depth of concern with which the claims of science were greeted by all theologians, and considering the manner in which the theory of value-judgments was received, it seems highly unlikely that Ritschl was not aware of the overtones of his theory of knowledge.

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[8] Leonhard Stählin, *Kant, Lotze, and Ritschl: A Critical Examination*, trans. D. W. Simon, (Edinburgh, 1889), p. 183.

[9] Orr, *The Ritschlian Theology*, p. 11.

The matter of specific influences on the formation of Ritschl's thought is a lengthy and unresolved quarrel, the principal lines of which will appear in the later pages of this chapter. Virtually all prominent, and a few obscure, figures of nineteenth and late eighteenth century German theology have been alleged with some justification as either negative or positive influences — a multiplicity compounded by Ritschl's own varied testimony as to his sources. The most important lines of instruction in methodology, however, seem to derive from Luther, Hegel, Kant, Lotze, Schleiermacher, Menken, and the members of the early Ritschlian school.

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[10] Albrecht Ritschl, The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and A. B. Macaulay, (New York, 1900), pp. 619-620. Cf. infra, pp. 46-54.

[11] Cf. the following statement by C. M. Mead, an early pioneer of Ritschlianism in America: "The other problem for which a solution was attempted was presented by the threatened conflict between Christianity and natural science..... This is attempted by insisting here....that religion consists in personal experiences which are undeniable, and are of such a sort that from the nature of the case they cannot be affected by any possible results of scientific research, being purely spiritual, whereas natural science has to do with the material world." "Ritschl's Place in the History of Doctrine," Hartford Seminary Record, V (1894-1895), 161-162.

In his customary succinct style, D. C. Macintosh rightly portrayed Ritschl's development:

> "As was the case with Schleiermacher, there was in Ritschl's religious and intellectual history an initial transition from an inherited conservative evangelicalism to a radical rationalism, followed by a new appreciation of the nature of religion and religious knowledge, which led to a vigorous reaction against intellectualism in religion."[12]

The fact that Ritschl passed through many of the important phases of thought of his time explained for Dr. Orr how he was able to touch his generation at so many points,[13] but for Garvie it accounted for the source of the innumerable inconsistencies.[14] Both were correct in their insight that Ritschl borrowed virtually everything from others and that his originality consisted in the effort to combine so many varying strains.

In the biography of his father, Otto Ritschl asserted that the greatest influence on the formation of Albrecht Ritschl's final beliefs was his father, Bishop George Charles Benjamin Ritschl. Unless this statement is concerned with the broader ranges of character development we would be inclined, with Robert Mackintosh, to find it primarily the exaggeration of a pious grandson.[15]

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[12] Douglas Clyde Macintosh, The Problem of Religious Knowledge (New York, 1940), p. 243.

[13] Orr, The Ritschlian Theology, pp. 12-13.

[14] Alfred E. Garvie, The Ritschlian Theology: Critical and Constructive: An Exposition and an Estimate (2nd ed.; Edinburgh, 1902), p. 22.

Albert Swing, among the earliest interpreters of Ritschl to America, found Ritschl positively influenced by Bernard's emphasis on the historic Christ, but repelled by the Augustine he discovered employing Christ as a stairway to the God of Neo-Platonism and the Aquinas concerned with the Deus absconditus behind the Son. Except for their moderation, the Institutes give some ground for Swing's further discovery of a methodological similarity in Calvin and Ritschl.[16] Luther is the classical theologian with whom Ritschl claimed the closest affinity. In both Theologie und Metaphysik and Justification and Reconciliation he argued that his theory of knowledge "corresponds to Luther's intention," perceiving finally that his contention "that religious knowledge consists of value-judgments is brought out in a felicitous way by Luther in his Larger Catechism, in the explanation of the First Commandment."[17] However, Mead's caution, borrowed from

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[15] Robert Mackintosh, Albrecht Ritschl and His School (London, 1915), p. 24.

[16] Albert Temple Swing, The Theology of Albrecht Ritschl (New York, 1901), pp. 34, 46, 48, 79. Cf. "The apprehension of Faith chiefly consists in our understanding what is His disposition toward us. For it is not of so much importance to us to know what He is in Himself as what He is willing to be to us." Institutes, I, p. 493. Cf. Tokujiro Hiraoka, Toward the Understanding of the Theology of Albrecht Ritschl and Its Significance for Modern Religious Ideas (New York, 1927), p. 33.

[17] "God is that Being, by reason of whose goodness and

Herrmann, that "we should follow Luther the evangelical Christian, not Luther the scholastic" would seem to be well advised.[18] Ritschl's view was that Luther's intention to move against scholasticism is clear and that the scholasticism of the second and succeeding generations of Lutherans is directly attributable to Melanchthon. In support of this view, he devoted the latter part of Theologie und Metaphysik to a demonstration of how the successive editions of the Loci lead away from Luther's original methodological insight into a lasting scholasticism.

Ritschl's well-known, early allegiance to the Hegelianism of F. C. Baur is evinced in the first edition of The Early Catholic Church (1850), but had been abandoned by the time of its second edition in 1857. Yet as Orr argues, the bold visions of the Hegelianism absorbed under Erdmann at Halle and Baur at Tübingen played some part even in the later, radical Ritschl. His concern with the "whole" in man's experience with nature, a prominent strain in the first edition of Justification and Reconciliation only partially removed in

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power you may certainly promise yourself all good things, and to whom you may go for refuge in whatever adverse circumstances may arise or dangers impend. So that to have God is nothing else than to trust and believe him with your whole heart..... These two, faith and God, must be united with one tie." Larger Catechism. Ritschl found a similar line of thought in the Augsburg Confession, XX, 24. Cf. Justification and Reconciliation, pp. 6, 211-212; Theologie und Metaphysik, p. 92.

[18] Charles M. Mead, "Ritschl's Theology," Presbyterian and Reformed Review, III, No. 9, 4, citing Herrmann's Die Gewissheit des Glaubens und die Freiheit der Theologie, p. 10.

the second and third, shows clear traces of the early Hegelian impulse. It may be that the occasional, bold departures from his anti-speculative methodology, e. g., in his "transcendent deduction of the Kingdom of God, and of the world of nature as a means to this, from the idea of the Divine love," are a residual Hegelianism.[19] In his own mind, of course, Ritschl felt he had repudiated the discipleship of his youth, and pictured himself as the inexorable foe of absolute idealism. In a quarrel with Frank he wrote:

> "Das Absolute! wie erhebend das klingt! Ich erinnere mich nur noch dunkel, dass das Wort mich in meiner Jugend beschäftigt hat, als die Hegelsche Terminologie auch mich in ihren Strudel zu ziehen drohte. Es ist lange her, und das Wort ist mir in dem Masse fremd geworden, als ich keinen weitreichenden Gedanken in demselben bezeichnet finde."[20]

The break with Baur meant for Ritschl a return to Kant. The debate as to whether Ritschl really turned to Kant or merely to a confused Lotzean epistemology is no more settled today than it was a half century ago. An uncritical study of Justification and Reconciliation and Theologie und Metaphysik leads to an acceptance of Ritschl's own verdict, viz., that he was not a Neo-Kantian but a follower of Lotze. However, a considerable body of his critics has resisted the temptation to accept Ritschl's own estimate of his sources, arguing that his refusal to assent to the more distinctive contributions of Lotze indicates that he was willing to follow his Göttingen colleague only so far as he was in agreement with Kant. This judgment, originally formulated by his son and biographer, was seconded by many, including Orr and Ståhlin who added the following explanation to the bold conclusion noted earlier in this paper:

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[19] Cf. Orr, The Ritschlian Theology, p. 31.

[20] Albrecht Ritschl, Theologie und Metaphysik: Zur Verständigung und Abwehr (2te Auflage; Bonn, 1887), p. 18. To preserve accuracy, throughout the paper references are made in the original language, except where authoritative and accepted translations are available.

> "On the one hand, as we have seen, his appeals to Lotze are in several cases unwarranted; and, on the other, the two great principles accepted by him are principles of philosophic thought in which Lotze and Kant are agreed. Lotze, too, dissevers the thing-in-itself from the phenomenon. According to him all knowledge is derived from experience, and phenomena are the sole objects of experience: he, too, separates moral-religious from theoretical knowledge. Lotze, however, advanced beyond Kant, to the extent of endeavouring to vindicate for the theoretical reason a knowledge of things-in-themselves; but here he is not followed by Ritschl..... Ritschl therefore stands on the Kantian platform: like Kant, he restricts knowledge to the phenomenal; like Kant, he bases religious knowledge on the moral consciousness."[21]

Perhaps the most startling divergence from Lotze is supplied in the question of the priority of the epistemological enterprise. Whereas Ritschl, in one of his best-known statements, argued that the theologian can proceed in his labors only under a definite, previously established theory of knowledge, Lotze insisted that it is "unsound" to approach metaphysics through epistemology, holding that "Metaphysics are the foundation of Psychology, not Psychology the foundation of Metaphysics."[22] Differences of this sort, combined with Ritschl's failure to venture fully into Lotze's metaphysic of "spirit-like-things," compel a revision of Ritschl's admitted dependence on his colleague. This is not to insist that Ritschl can be described solely as Neo-Kantian; his disputes with Kant, particularly with that view of religion which makes it a mere appendage to morality, are too deep to allow such a simple reconciliation.[23] Rather, it is contended that the student of Ritschlianism must take more serious account than have his predecessors of Ritschl's radical proposal that "the quite specific advance in epistemological method made by Kant has at the same time the significance of a practical restoration of Protestantism."[24] In the light of his conclusion elsewhere that the Reformation message acquired a lasting corruption in the second generation from Melanchthon, this is to give Kant a position of no little religious prominence and to imply, surely, a major epistemological influence from Königsberg on Ritschl's own thinking.

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[21] Ståhlin, Kant, Lotze, and Ritschl, pp. 184-185. Cf. Otto Ritschl, Leben, II, 391; Ståhlin, Kant, Lotze, and Ritschl, p. 183; Orr, The Ritschlian Theology, pp. 33-34, 39; Gregory Dexter Walcott, Kantian and Lutheran Elements in Ritschl's Conception of God (New York, 1904), pp. 104-105; Paul L. Lehmann, A Critical Comparison of the Doctrine of Justification in the Theologies of Albrecht Ritschl and Karl Barth (New York, 1936), pp. 415-416.

The reason why Ritschl felt compelled to designate his epistemology as Lotzean and not Kantian is clear enough: If the "real thing" is pictured as somehow lying "behind" its representational phenomena (and this is clearly Ritschl's understanding of Kantianism[25]), then the Christian theologian is hard pressed to prove consistently his case that God is truly present to man in Christ. This difficulty is doubly compounded when that theologian insists, as Ritschl did, that Christ is the sole revelation of God offered to men, for, if God is not *really* present *in* Christ, there is no possibility of communication between God and man. Among other things, Ritschl found in Lotze the assurance that the "real thing" is present in effects upon us, and hence was able to declare that God was *really* in Christ. In his own mind, this conclusion was Lotzean and not Kantian, a judgment causing severe confusion among his critics.[26]

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[22] Cf. Albrecht Ritschl, Theologie und Metaphysik, p. 40; Justification and Reconciliation, pp. 15-16; Stählin, Kant, Lotze, and Ritschl, pp. 159-160.

[23] Cf. Albrecht Ritschl, A Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation, trans. John S. Black (Edinburgh, 1872), pp. 409ff.

[24] Ibid., p. 389.

The direct opposition between Orr's contention, that the first edition of *Justification and Reconciliation* was written under a Kantian influence which had been displaced by Lotze at the time of the third edition,[27] and Robert Mackintosh's argument that the early Lotzeanism shifted to a later Kantianism[28] is caused by the multiplicity of Ritschl's arguments and by his failure to remove all traces of earlier, but repudiated, positions. Mackintosh is right in that Ritschl's first edition view of religion as the tendency to view the "whole" of experience is Lotzean and is mainly supplanted in the later editions. On the other hand, Orr has ground for argument in that the entire, later (primarily third edition) concern with "value-judgments" is clearly dependent on Lotze's distinction between "judging according to worth" and theoretic philosophy. It would appear that Ritschl did not accept Lotze uncritically, but agreed to and rejected portions of his colleague's philosophy as they suited his purposes.

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[25] Cf. *Justification and Reconciliation*, pp. 18-20; *Theologie und Metaphysik*, pp. 32ff.

[26] This entire discussion no doubt devolves into the question of the right understanding of Kant, a problem we hardly propose to resolve here. Orr's attempt, *viz.*, "To say, as Kant does, that the 'real thing' is unknowable in itself, and with Ritschl that it is known only in the phenomenon (*i. e.*, its subjective effects) are two expressions for the same thing" (*The Ritschlian Theology*, p. 39), is perhaps too simple; — although it seems to have been the judgment of the Neo-Kantians. It is sufficient to record that Ritschl felt he could express his conviction that God was in Christ only in Lotzean terms and that many critics, including his son, have taken issue with this limitation.

[27] Orr, *The Ritschlian Theology*, p. 23.

Not long after Ritschl's death an effort was made to discover the exact origin of the phrase "value-judgment." Thus, Reischle has located the phrase (but without the modifying "religious") in Pokorny (1869), Rümelin (1871), and Olawsky (1873). Feuerbach's analysis of religion has been termed instructive, as has Herbart's, through its influence on the formation of Lotze's thought. Ritschl's son emphasized this sentence from De Wette: "We recognize....not only the existence of things, we also *assign* them a value, and it is this assigning of value that drives us on to action, inasmuch as the value becomes our purpose."[29] One outstanding aspect of this problem is that the theory of value-judgments did not appear in the first edition of *Justification and Reconciliation* (1874), although some of the later, supporting arguments are present; it was not until the second edition (1883) that the theory was explicitly formulated, and the third (1888) that it became dominant. In the intervening years the phrase had been employed by Herrmann (1879) and Kaftan (1881). It was in a review of Kaftan's *Essence of the Christian Religion* that Ritschl first took up the term, subsequently introducing it into his own second edition. If only in this minor matter of terminology — for the structure of the theory is surely Ritschl's — the teacher had learned from his disciples.

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[28] Robert Mackintosh, *Albrecht Ritschl and His School*, p. 160.

[29] Garvie, *The Ritschlian Theology*, pp. 180-181, following Otto Ritschl, *Ueber Werthurtheile*, pp. 8-9 (italics mine). *Cf*. D. C. Macintosh, *The Problem of Religious Knowledge*, p. 246;

It is difficult to determine the exact extent of Schleiermacher's influence on Ritschl. John Baillie has probably overstated the case in arguing that "Schleiermacher was, without doubt, the chief of the several influences acting upon Ritschl,"[30] particularly in the light of Ritschl's own conclusion that

> "Schleiermacher nimmt an dem Grundfehler dieser Lehrweise Theil (Scholastic rationalism), indem er als ersten Theil der Dogmatik das fromme Selbstbewusstsein darstellt, welches in jeder christlichen Gemüthserregung immer schon vorausgesetzt wird, aber auch immer mit enthalten ist. Das heisst, seine allgemeine Lehre von Gott ist natürliche Theologie, gerade wie bei Melanchthon."[31]

Baillie, *The Interpretation of Religion*, p. 162; F. Lichtenberger, *History of German Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. W. Hastie (Edinburgh, 1889), pp. 372-373.

[30] Baillie, *The Interpretation of Religion*, p. 283.

[31] *Theologie und Metaphysik*, p. 65.

Yet in an earlier passage Ritschl had asserted that in methodology Schleiermacher was his predecessor.[32] Ritschl does seem to have been strongly impressed by Schleiermacher's view of "dependence" as the ultimate expression of the religious relation (although his theory of religion fails to present this in terms of feeling), by Schleiermacher's conclusion that the theologian must take up his standpoint within the faith of the religious community, and particularly by Schleiermacher's insistence that "religion is a thing by itself, sui generis, not to be confused with morality, still less with science; but a genuinely independent force in human life."[33] On the other hand, it must be noted that Ritschl did not possess Schleiermacher's interest in Greek thought and was repelled by that form of mystical piety which his predecessor had gained from a Moravian background. But, in spite of the numerous positive influences, these relatively minor differences are sufficiently strong to provoke so severe a verdict as "I doubt if Schleiermacher represents any absolute advance beyond all that went before him, and especially beyond Kant."[34]

The difficulty experienced in locating the lines of influence on Ritschl's thought is occasioned by his own failure to acknowledge his sources firmly and consistently. This brief listing of suggested predecessors may be closed with mention of the one theologian to whom Ritschl gave clear and unequivocal assent:

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[32] Ibid., p. 54. Cf. A Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation, p. 443.

[33] H. R. Mackintosh, "Theology of A. Ritschl," Expositor, 7th Series, I (1906), 413. Cf. John Oman, The Problem of Faith and Freedom in the Last Two Centuries (New York, 1906), p. 357.

[34] Otto Ritschl, Albrecht Ritschls Leben, II, p. 82, as quoted in D. C. Macintosh, The Problem of Religious Knowledge, p. 243.

> "Ich kenne nur einen einzigen Theologen, welcher mit dieser gesammten Ueberlieferung gebrochen hat: Gottfried Menken. Seinen 'Versuch einer Anleitung zum eigenen Unterricht in den Wahrheiten der heiligen Schrift' (Bremen 1805. 1825 u. s. w.) eröffnet er mit folgendem Satze: 'Man hat nie ein Volk, ja nie einen einzelnen Menschen gefunden, der eine natürliche Religion gehabt hätte, d. h. eine solche, deren Begriffe, Wahrheiten, Gebote, Gebräuche und Hoffnungen ihm angeboren gewesen wären, oder der vor allem Unterricht, vor aller Erziehung und Umgang mit Menschen, ohne alle Lehre, Ueberlieferung und Geschichte, durch Nachdenken und Speculation dazu gekommen wäre, und seine Religion nicht als heilige Lehre göttlichen Ursprungs, sondern allein als das Resultat seiner Speculation gegeben und so hätte angesehen haben wollen.'"[35]

The influences, both positive and negative, of these many sources justify Ecke's agreement to the proposition "that Ritschl borrowed nearly everything from others." But he is also correct when he continues, "Nevertheless, the way in which Ritschl formulated these principles and combined them is an altogether original one."[36] It is to this original combination that we now turn.

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[35] Theologie und Metaphysik, pp. 65-66. Ritschl's interest in Menken would appear limited to the latter's critical analysis of the Enlightenment, Fichte and Hegel. It is doubtful that Ritschl was attracted to Menken's Biblicism or much of his positive work, although Barth locates a similarity in their concepts of divine love. Cf. Karl Barth, Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert: Ihre Vorgeschichte und ihre Geschichte (Zurich, 1947), pp. 469-483.

[36] Gustav Ecke, Die theologische Schule Albrecht Ritschls und die evangelische Kirche der Gegenwart, pp. 14, 15, as quoted in Garvie, The Ritschlian Theology, p. 22n.

THE COLLAPSE OF RATIONALISM

The line of thought which ended in the theory of value-judgments began in Ritschl's recognition of reason's inability to prove the existence of God, or at least the God of Christian faith, by means of the familiar arguments.[37] The case which he presented against these "so-called proofs" was not original with him, although the conclusions he drew from the collapse of the proofs are more extreme than most of his predecessors'. His technical objection to the proofs was twofold: a) Even when arranged most felicitously (the ontological argument being urged in support of the cosmological and teleological arguments, as in Duns Scotus), it is not difficult to see that they fail to prove the objective existence of God as contrasted with His existence in thought; b) Whatever their validity, that Being whose existence they are alleged to prove is not the God of Christian faith.[38] In spite of the fact that Ritschl argued the first objection cogently, the second is the true impulse for his reconstruction of dogma. The doctrinal understanding of the Christian God was lost early in the history of the Church when, during the

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[37] It must be noted, however, that in the first edition of Justification and Reconciliation Ritschl did assert that Kant's moral argument gave not practical faith but theoretic knowledge. But this notion was basically repudiated in the succeeding editions.

[38] Justification and Reconciliation, pp. 214-215. Cf. ibid., p. 17.

Trinitarian and Christological controversies, it was felt that the expression of faith "must be demonstrated as a universal truth of reason, in relation to the knowledge of the world which men had then attained."[39] "This fiction" was continued into the Middle Ages, challenged by Luther, but renewed under Melanchthon and the generations which, troubled by the irrationality of the religious wars following upon the proliferation of Protestantism, sought a universal standard which would guarantee a rational security. This impulse, first asserted as a bulwark for the truths of revelation, led finally into English Deism whose "chief result is shown in the final reduction of Christianity to the religion of nature by means of the very assumptions in accordance with which orthodoxy had, in the converse way, asserted the identity of the two."[40] The historical collapse of this effort to coordinate the truths of reason and revelation was not due to any failure in the application of the method but to the error of the method itself. The solution is divorce, and "the question for Christian theology is not what idea of God can be shown to be the presumptive content of natural conviction, but what declarations of Christ we have."[41]

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[39] *Ibid.*, p. 193. *Cf.* *A Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 324.

[40] *Ibid.*, pp. 323-325. Ritschl wisely recognized that the mediaeval search for proofs for the existence of God was not founded on any real doubt concerning His existence. The problem for Anselm and Aquinas is identical with Ritschl's, *viz.*, the relationship between the truths of reason and those of revelation. Ritschl saw that the scholastics, in fashioning reason as the bride of faith, made the authority of revelation derivative. In an oblique reference he observed that "the content of our thought would not be really God, if we still posited something as prior in order to deduce from it His character as love." (*Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 283.) His conclusion, therefore, is "the contrary principle, that religion and theoretical knowledge are different functions of spirit, which, when they deal with the same objects, are not even partially coincident, but wholly diverge." (*Ibid.*, p. 194.)

The error of scholasticism and its modern descendants is not a lack of the religious impulse, but a defensiveness vis-à-vis secular philosophy which has forced it into a false epistemology. Ritschl saw as his vocation the construction of an epistemology which would vouchsafe for revelation and theology a freedom from restriction and corruption by reason and philosophy.[42] This intellectual journey — which was to culminate in the theory of value-judgments — began with a "false start." Probably under the influence of Lotze, Ritschl argued, in the first edition of *Justification and Reconciliation*, that the distinguishing characteristic of religion is its proper impulse to view the world as a whole, while science's legitimate concern must be restricted to the formulation of particular laws dealing with particular phenomena. This happy solution provided Ritschl with an inflexible wall of separation between sacred and secular knowledge, and with a persuasive theory of religion. Thus, by a *tour de force* of definition Ritschl was able to destroy, *e. g.*, materialism's claim to scientific stability by arguing that the unity which it achieves is not scientific, but religious:

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[41] Ibid., p. 260. Cf. ibid., p. 539. In The Ritschlian Theology Dr. Garvie seems to argue that Ritschl allows one "proof" for the existence of God: "....while Ritschl denies that the world itself, viewed from the standpoint of philosophy, can yield the idea of God, yet he maintains that from the standpoint of religious faith in God an inference may be drawn from the order and law of the world to an active and rational will. What he forbids philosophy to do, that he will allow to theology" (p. 83). Garvie's effort here obviously fails because he does not seem to understand that the very nature of "proof" is argument from one ground to a conclusion not obviously contained in that ground. If Ritschl's statements referred to in this passage were meant as "proof" they would clearly be circular. Ritschl's contention here is merely that one's ultimate commitment has implications for one's spiritual relationship to the world and other men.

[42] Pfleiderer's remark (The Development of Theology in Germany Since Kant, and Its Progress in Great Britain Since 1825, trans. J. Frederick Smith (London, 1890), p. 183) that "we may conjecture that Ritschl did not make this theory of cognition the basis of his theology from the first, but rather propounded it subsequently in its defence" has stirred a lively controversy among students of Ritschl. Edghill (Faith and Fact: A Study of Ritschlianism, (London, 1910), p. 67) has urged that "the Ritschlian theory of knowledge is the basis upon which the whole edifice of the Ritschlian theology has been erected." The issue is probably an academic one, and the two positions do not seem irrevocably opposed. If the explicit formulation of Ritschl's epistemology did not chronologi-

> "the intermingling and collision of religion and philosophy always arises from the fact that the latter claims to produce in its own fashion a unified view of the world. This, however, betrays rather an impulse religious in nature, which philosophers ought to have distinguished from the cognitive methods they follow .....Under the guise of philosophic knowledge, what was really only the religious imagination has been operative in designing the general philosophic view of the world, the supreme principle of which is never proved as such, but always merely anticipatively assumed."[43]

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cally precede the bulk of his theology it must have been implicit in the development of that theology for it controlled a number of his conclusions, *e. g.*, his refusal to consider the pre-existence of Christ. Stählin's view is probably the most accurate: Ritschl "himself has declared that the specific character of his theology is due to a *theory of cognition* which his opponents have not properly considered; and has thus himself laid his finger on the point from which any attempts to arrive at a proper estimate of his position and views must proceed." (*Kant, Lotze, and Ritschl*, p. 3.)

[43] *Justification and Reconciliation*, pp. 207-208.

It is difficult to assess the importance for Ritschl of this effort to create an epistemology and theory of religion in terms of the object of religious knowledge. As Ritschl's major British critics, Orr, Garvie and Robert Mackintosh, observed, this theory was characteristic of the first edition, being replaced in the second and third by the concept of value-judgments and a changed theory of religion; yet here again Ritschl's inconsistent revision of the editions is distressing to the reader, for the view appears, apparently more by accident than design, in the third edition, as in the quotation cited above.

Whatever the inconsistencies in the revision of the third edition Ritschl appears to have found at least two defects in this view of religion as concerned with the unity of experience. As a theory of religion it may be applied successfully to Christianity, Islam and the more sophisticated religions, but its usefulness in dealing with non-literate forms of worship is quited limited. Secondly, as a means of securing an adequate separation of religious and theoretic knowledge, Ritschl soon saw that his definition was quite obviously arbitrary. Although the effort to achieve, e. g., a unified field-theory may have as its source a "religious" concern for unity in life, this fact does not necessitate the surrender of the scientific method. Ritschl's recognition of the collapse of this early view appears in a passage unpardonably close to an affirmation of the theory:

"The possibility of both kinds of knowledge mingling,

> or, again, colliding, lies in this, that they deal with the same object, namely, the world. Now we cannot rest content with the amiable conclusion that Christian knowledge comprehends the world as a whole, while philosophy fixes the special and universal laws of nature and spirit. For with this task every philosophy likewise combines the ambition to comprehend the universe under one supreme law."[44]

However, in the early edition the prominence of this "amiable conclusion" did allow Ritschl sufficient ground for arguing one of his basic concerns, viz., that theology is a science deserving respect from its secular colleagues. For it was only when Ritschl maintained that the line separating philosophic and religious knowledge could be drawn in terms of the known object, regardless of the condition of the knowing subject — it was only then that he could reverse Kant's moral argument, asserting that this proof gives theoretic knowledge and not merely truths for practical faith. But with the collapse of the early theory of knowledge Ritschl recognized that he could no longer support his alteration of the Kantian formula, and by the time of the publication of Theologie und Metaphysik and the third edition of Justification and Reconciliation he had reversed his position to complete accord with Kant.[45]

THE VALUE-JUDGMENT

After this early "false start" Ritschl developed his more noted and lasting theory of "value-judgments."[46] In this effort to liberate theology the two major concerns (an epistemology which would guarantee the independence of religious and philosophic knowledge, and an adequate theory of religion), which had been combined in the early theory of "unity in experience," were set apart and employed to supply separate, but co-ordinate, approaches to the theory of "value-judgment." It is to the first route, through Ritschl's separation of religious and theoretic knowledge, that our attention now turns.

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[44] Ibid., p. 203.

[45] Cf. Garvie, The Ritschlian Theology, pp. 74-75, 85; Orr, The Ritschlian Theology, pp. 55-69; Robert Mackintosh, Albrecht Ritschl and His School, p. 173, et passim.

Separation of Religious and Theoretic Knowledge: The attraction for disciples of the sensational and the simplified — an attraction which has distorted the thought of not a few founders of a school — appeared in Ritschl's history in the slogan "theology without metaphysics." In many quarters this characterization was accepted as an adequate description of Ritschlianism and was the subject for many of the more superficial criticisms.[47] It is quite possible that this confusion arose from Ritschl's partial equation of metaphysics with epistemology,[48] but whatever the case, "theology without metaphysics" was not Ritschl's intent. Luthardt, though surely not a disciple, had been misled by this simplification and his criticism of it offered the setting for Ritschl's rebuttal in Part I of Theologie und Metaphysik. Perceiving that "jeder Theolog als wissenschaftlicher Mann (ist) genöthigt oder verpflichtet, nach einer bestimmten Theorie der Erkenntniss zu verfahren, deren er sich bewusst sein und deren Recht er nachweisen muss,"[49] he sought to locate an epistemology which would not subvert the independence of the Biblical revelation, *i. e.*, that would not reconstruct that revelation in terms of a popular philosophy, *e. g.*, Hegelianism. Ritschl clearly asserted a metaphysic (epistemology) and wisely saw that many of his disputes originated here:

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[46] Generally "Werthurtheil," but occasionally "Werthbestimmung."

[47] Again, it may be argued that Ritschl gave adequate ground for such a simplification; yet the careful and sympathetic reader, particularly of Theologie und Metaphysik, will find "theology without metaphysics" a misleading distortion.

[48] Cf. infra, p. 33.

> "Demgemäss ist es eine unüberlegte und unglaubliche Behauptung, dass ich alle Metaphysik aus der Theologie ausschiede. Denn wenn ich in der Theologie wissenschaftlich besähigt bin, und das ist mir im Allgemeinen noch nicht bestritten worden, so werde ich eine Erkenntnisstheorie befolgen, welche in der Bestimmung der Erkenntnissobjecte sich nach einem Begriff vom Dinge richten, also metaphysische sein wird. Deshalb wird der Streit zwischen Luthardt und mir richtig nur so formulirt, welche Metaphysik in der Theologie berechtigt ist. Das Recht des Besitzes in der theologischen Ueberlieferung, die ich aufgegeben habe, und für die meine Gegner eintreten, hat ja die platonische Erkenntnisstheorie."[50]

For Ritschl, this Hellenizing of Christianity — begun in the early church, determinative in Augustine, repudiated in Luther, reintroduced in Melanchthon,[51] triumphant in Hegel — through a false epistemology (metaphysics), subordinated God to the Absolute, Christ to reason, revelation to philosophy. To free the Christian revelation from bondage to the Platonic world-view, Ritschl understood that he must engage in the philosophic enterprise; but here philosophy was to be regulative and not constitutive.

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[49] Theologie und Metaphysik, p. 40.

[50] Ibid., pp. 40-41.

[51] In an interesting parallel, Ritschl found that the historic situation was reflected in his own struggles: "Wer aber ferner den Tenor der Lehre Melanchthon's von Gott in der Texten (of the Loci) von 1533 und 1535 zu vergleichen so gefällig ist, wird mir zugeben, dass der Streit zwischen Frank und mir eigentlich die offene Controverse von Melanchthon versus Melanchthon ist." (Theologie und Metaphysik, p. 63.)

(It must be remarked parenthetically that again the difficulty experienced in grasping Ritschl's thought is caused by his own misuse of words. Orr, Garvie, Mozley and H. R. Mackintosh observed that Ritschl had a tendency to equate metaphysics and epistemology without explanation to the reader. As Dr. Garvie reported, Ritschl's assumption "that a discussion of the regulative conceptions of human knowledge is metaphysics" may be applicable to an Absolute Idealism which discovers an identity of thought and being; but when "a relative dualism of knowing and being is recognized" a theory of knowledge does not constitute a metaphysic.[52] To be sure, the brief analysis which Ritschl did allow to Being derives from his theory of knowledge, but his use of the term "metaphysics" covered a wider area and often that usually described by "epistemology.")

The foundation of the theory of value-judgments is the argument that in its survey of Being metaphysics is unable to distinguish nature from spirit. In its search for a universally applicable concept of "the thing" "the purely metaphysical determination of a spiritual force is not able to distinguish it from a natural force."[53] This is to say, in its analysis of events, unaided reason is unable to rise above some type of materialism.

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[52] Garvie, The Ritschlian Theology, pp. 54-55.

> "Metaphysische Begriffe sind die elementaren Erkenntnisse, in welchen man die Objecte des Erkennens eben nur als solche, als Dinge im Allgemeinen fixirt, in ihrer Einzelheit und weiter in ihrer gegebenen Stellung zu einander. In deiser Betrachtungsweise enthält man sich der Unterscheidung der Erkenntnissobjecte als Natur und als Geist. Man erkennt also geistige Grössen in metaphysischer Methode nur oberflächlich, unvollständig, nicht in ihrer eigenthümlichen Wirklichkeit."[54]

Spirit is impossible for reason; or, in a more modern usage, spirit is a scandal to reason.

Yet, the whole range of human experience testifies to the real existence of spirit. The only solution which Ritschl perceived for this problem of the two aspects of experience was the assertion of two methods of knowing: the theoretic ("metaphysical" or "scientific") and the religious. The distinction is well stated by Orr in one of his many essays on Ritschlianism:

> "Two kinds of knowledge are distinguished by Ritschl — the one, religious knowledge which moves solely in the region of what he calls worth- or value-judgments (Werthurtheile), *i. e.*, judgments which express not the objective truth of things, but their value to us as subjects of pleasure and pain; and the other, theoretical or world-knowledge, which deals with things in the light of the causal judgment, and seeks to establish their objective (phenomenal) relations."[55]

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[53] Swing, *The Theology of Albrecht Ritschl*, p. 63.

[54] *Theologie und Metaphysik*, pp. 30-31.

[55] James Orr, *Ritschlianism; Expository and Critical Essays* (London, 1903), p. 17.

Religious knowledge and theoretic knowledge: two ways of knowing, not different types of objects (since the repudiation of Lotze's "amiable conclusion"), but the same object, viz., the world, or more accurately the sum of experience.

It must be made clear that Ritschl had no basic quarrel with what he termed theoretic knowledge. He did not argue that reason is blind or impotent; rather, in its field it is a highly proper and successful technique for gaining information. The limitation which he placed on unaided reason was not one of power but of scope: the causal explanation of experience which reason is admirably fitted to provide is not the sole means of understanding available to man. Ritschl seems to have meant that reason can interpret every phenomenon in terms of its natural causes and operations, but that this is not the sole explanation of which experience is capable. Each item of experience has its natural, causal relation to every other item; but it also has a value for man, and it is precisely this value which reason is unable to treat. While it is true that we can have theoretic knowledge of the calculus of values which men cherish, we cannot, by reason, have knowledge of those values in the integrity they have for the valuing man.

Thus, Ritschl argued, by the very act of judging according to worth our body of knowledge is enlarged, and we become aware of a facet of experience closed to reason. At this point it is important to observe a minor distinction drawn by Ritschl which has caused confusion among some of his critics. There are, he argued, concomitant (or "accompanying") value-judgments and independent value-judgments.[56] The latter are those judgments which perceive the spiritual ends in experience and give a knowledge which is to be contrasted with theoretic knowledge; concomitant value-judgments, on the other hand, are a necessary adjunct to theoretic knowledge since they affirm interest in the matter under investigation. That is to say the scientist must affirm the worth of the investigation he undertakes; the fact that he gives it attention indicates that he finds it, and not some other activity, of present value.[57] This matter is of little importance since Ritschl's concern was with independent value-judgments exclusively, yet it is an interesting observation for a modern world which, having repudiated "investigation for its own sake," has begun to question seriously the value of research, or at least invention, along certain lines.

The act of judging value is a noetic act. Having asserted reason's inability to supply an adequate explanation of the experienced fact of spirit operative in the world, Ritschl sought a means which would deliver him from complete agnosticism. This method he was able to find in the contention, developed by Lotze and others, that the act of judging according to worth adds to our store of knowledge. Although we cannot, by reason, know what God is in Himself, we can know, as a datum of immediate experience, the value He has for us, and it is this "worth for us" that Ritschl termed "religious knowledge." This knowledge by judgment is best described by contrast with theoretic knowledge, and this is well demonstrated in H. R. Mackintosh's excellent illustration:

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[56] Justification and Reconciliation, pp. 204-207.

[57] It is curious that Ritschl did not press the description of concomitant value-judgments further. It would not seem a difficult matter to argue that the judgment of the worth of an investigation must ultimately lead back to an independent value-judgment of a moral, if not a religious, end. Thus, if the ultimate purpose of a line of inquiry be only curiosity as to the probable outcome, this is yet an independent judgment affirming the moral end of personal satisfaction. The argument is even more obvious in the case of inquiry into the origin of cancerous growths.

> "Thus, 'Jesus Christ died upon the Cross' is a judgment of fact only; it is a statement to which the pure historian may assent: 'we have redemption through His blood' is a judgment of value or personal conviction. It expresses what we find in the fact, the attitude we take up to it; our appreciation of it, in short, as bearing upon our personal life and affecting will and feeling."[58]

If one is willing to set up the problem as Ritschl did, *i. e.*, accept this very broad meaning for "knowledge," then surely the act of judging does add to our store of knowledge. Now, Ritschl was greatly concerned lest the religious knowledge gained by judgments of value be taken as truths of theoretic reason. As Dr. Garvie pointed out in reference to *Theologie und Metaphysik*, the reason behind Ritschl's anxiety was that the primary constitutive role which reason can exercise in theology is "to prove the harmony of the Christian revelation....with a superior general view of the world, which is claimed to be the universal and the rational one."[59] But this is to make the validity of the Christian revelation derivative and quite secondary. The mere fact that the highest value is placed on reason is to make it the center of trust, *i. e.*, God. There seems little doubt that Ritschl was here considering the Hegelianism which made the insights of revelation a popularization of the truths of philosophy.

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[58] H. R. Mackintosh, "Theology of A. Ritschl", *op. cit.*, p. 406.

Religious knowledge is "personal" knowledge; it is what God means to us, and makes no pretensions to knowledge of what God is apart from the human perspective. Auguste Sabatier, not uninfluenced by Ritschlianism, required this distinction in his theory of "critical symbolism":

> "If you were to admit, *e. g.*, that philosophers may succeed (as they have often been believed to do) in establishing a veritable objective science of God, and if they were thus to know God in Himself and apart from the religious ego, that scientific knowledge of God, even if it were possible, would not be religious knowledge; for to know God religiously is to know Him in His relation to us — that is to say, in our consciousness, in so far as He is present in it, and determines it towards piety."[60]

Yet it is precisely this problem of the relationship between these two types of knowledge which gave the Ritschlian epistemology its greatest hurdle. If Christ has the value of God, does this mean that He *is* God? Ritschl's contemporaries persisted in asking this question as an item of theoretic knowledge; they were interested in learning whether religious valuing gave theoretic certainty. Dr. Garvie's eloquent reply, which is the only one which can be offered in explanation of Ritschl's thought at this point, must be cited in full:

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[59] Garvie, *The Ritschlian Theology*, p. 71. *Cf*. *Theologie und Metaphysik*, p. 24.

[60] Auguste Sabatier, *Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion Based on Psychology and History* (New York, 1897), pp. 309-310.

> "First of all, let it be said again, although were it not for persistent misconception of Ritschl on this point repetition would be quite unnecessary, that when he calls the application of the predicate of divinity to Christ a value-judgment he does not mean that Christ is not God in reality, but that we imagine or represent Him to be God, either to cheat ourselves or to flatter Him. This predicate of divinity is not a fancy born of our need or of our love. It is the only adequate explanation we can give of a fact of our religious experience. Had we not this experience of what Christ has done for us, for us at least the fact would not exist demanding this explanation. This dependence of the genuine confession of Christ's divinity on the actual experience of His grace is all that is meant, neither more nor less, by describing it as a value-judgment. Christ has for us the worth of God, and therefore we call Him God. The critics of Ritschlianism assume, it is true, that Christ may have the worth of God for us without being God; but this distinction between the value and the existence of God is one of those logical subtleties for which they alone can claim the credit, for the Ritschlian school is quite innocent of it. When Ritschl says that Christ has the worth of God, he is neither so much the fool nor the knave as to mean that Christ is not God; but as a sincere and intelligent thinker he means that Christ is God."[61]

What then is reason's role in the work of theology? Robert Mackintosh has conveniently summarized the function which Ritschl allowed to reason: a) Reason may serve the formal role of supplying the theologian with the tools with which he can explain the revelation of religious experience. Philosophy may play a regulative, but not a constitutive, part in the development of theology. b) Edition one, of course, had maintained that philosophy, through Kant's moral argument, could supply theology with a complete demonstration of the existence of God which would be true, not only for practical faith, but for theoretic reason. As has been observed, this view fell with Ritschl's repudiation of his early theory of religion, and was not consistently argued in the third edition. c) Reason may be employed by theology to demonstrate that personality (not the result of a value-judgment) can without contradiction be applied to God.[62] d) Reason may be used to demonstrate the logical harmony of the different parts of the Christian revelation.[63] In the light of the repudiation of b) and the questionable character of c), Ritschl equated reason's role in theology with the recognition that communication among rational men must proceed in rational form. Thus, given a minimal community of commitment, theology may set out in rationally consistent terms the various elements of that commitment, but it is incapable of setting out an argument undergirding that commitment. This would seem to be Ritschl's meaning when he wrote that theology has for its "aim the explanation of the phenomena of the Christian life" but that it is "incompetent for it to enter upon either a direct or an indirect proof of the Christian revelation by seeking to show that it agrees with some philosophical or juridical view of the world."[64]

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[61] Garvie, The Ritschlian Theology, p. 267. Garvie appears to have been too optimistic in the latter part of his penultimate sentence, for it was precisely this "logical subtlety" which forced Kaftan away from the main body of the school and into his "un-Ritschlian" view of existence-judgments founded on value-judgments.

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[62] Justification and Reconciliation, pp. 228-238. However, as Traub observed, there is considerable doubt that Ritschl can argue this point consistently.

[63] Robert Mackintosh, Albrecht Ritschl and His School, pp. 182-186.

The limitation of theoretic knowledge to the description of natural causality necessitated a similar restriction of religious knowledge, viz., that theology cannot exceed the bounds of value-judgment, that is, it cannot advance beyond a description of immediate religious experience. While Ritschl often gave little attention to this limitation, e. g., in his transcendental deduction of the Kingdom of God from the love of God, it provided him with sufficient reason for refusing to discuss certain other traditional theological issues — although, to be sure, he was not always well understood in this. A brief listing of some of these matters may be illustrative of the new limits which Ritschl placed on theology. Firstly, most troublesome for his British critics was Ritschl's revised estimate of miracle as expressing the religious value of a particular event to the believer, but independent of any judgment referring to its objective relations to nature. Secondly, this division, which was later to become the ground for the charge of "double truth," was paralleled in Ritschl's approving estimate of Bernard's analysis of freedom: "Bernard refers the good work (reconciliation) in its entirety to God's grace when viewed from the religious point of view, and to the freedom of the will rendered free by grace when viewed from the moral point of view."[65] Thirdly, Ritschl refused to consider any part of the doctrine of the pre-existence of Christ because, he found, it has no direct bearing on our immediate religious experience, i. e., it is a metaphysical proposition divorced from judgment of value. Similarly, any claim to the unio mystica was dismissed by Ritschl as an intrusion of the false metaphysics in the field of religious experience.

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[64] Justification and Reconciliation, pp. 49, 24.

This list, of course, culminates in Ritschl's transformed Christology:

> "To believe in Christ implies that we accept the value of the Divine love, which is manifest in His work, for our reconciliation with God, with that trust which, directed to Him, subordinates itself to God as His and our Father; whereby we are assured of eternal life and blessedness. Faith in Christ is neither belief in the truth of His history nor assent to a scientific judgment of knowledge such as that presented by the Chalcedonian formula.....In so far as trust in Him includes a knowledge of Him, this knowledge will determine the value of His work for our salvation."[66]

This concern with "religious value for us" swept aside for Ritschl any metaphysical or "scientific" judgments of essential nature. The knowledge we have of God consists of those judgments we make concerning His worth in our lives. Ritschl carried this thesis, with its inevitable reconstruction of theology, throughout the entire range of doctrine. To this end, the latter half of Justification and Reconciliation is devoted to a reformulation of the concepts of sin, Providence, forgiveness, conscience, prayer, etc. It must be observed that while Ritschl's critics were fired by the fate of these individual items of doctrine at Ritschl's hands, their real debate was with the methodological principle which supported them, *viz*., that questions of ultimate nature in a metaphysical sense are not religious and are not possible, and that the only proper and possible means to religious knowledge is by value-judgment.

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[65] A Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation, p. 96.

[66] Justification and Reconciliation, p. 591.

However, one consequence of the theory of value-judgments based on the separation of theoretic and religious knowledge which was to receive virtually unanimous support from the critics was Ritschl's affirmation of the centrality of the community. The form of this approbation often suggests that the critics, hostile to the theory of value-judgments, have found the emphasis on community to be independent of the Ritschlian epistemology. Again, the obscurities and revisions in Ritschl's works make decision difficult. While it would seem certain that one can insist on the social character of religion without, at the same time, advocating a theory of value-judgments, the particular form of Ritschl's theory of knowledge requires a correlative emphasis on the community. Although Ritschl does not seem to have referred explicitly to this correlation, the fact that the passages devoted to this emphasis stand near his brief discussions of knowledge indicates an implicit awareness of the connection. Having undercut by his separation of theoretic and religious knowledge the two means by which the individual, isolated from the community, can approach God, *viz*., natural theology and mysticism, Ritschl turned to the community as the bearer of revelation. If purely mystical knowledge is delusion, and if the organization and functions of the natural world *per se* give no certain knowledge of God, then the only contact between the divine and the human must lie in the history and faith of the community. This conclusion had two important consequences for the Ritschlian theory of knowledge. The first, highly praised by his critics, was his contention that "we are able to know and understand God, sin, conversion, eternal life, in the Christian sense, only so far as we consciously and intentionally reckon ourselves members of the community which Christ has founded."[67] Ritschl's later concern with the Kingdom of God is foreshadowed in another passage which observed that justification is related to the whole of the religious community "and to individuals only as they attach themselves, by faith in the Gospel, to the community."[68] Here Ritschl saw two types of enemies: the one which, following the traditional theology of Melanchthon, found the religious relation of justification to be solely an experience of the individual; the other, the biographers of the life of Jesus who, involved in "a complete misconception of the problem," followed the principle "that historical knowledge of Christ is possible only in so far as one is divested of religious devotion to Him."[69] Ritschl perceived that the reason why each of these different positions could prosper was their common and erroneous view that religious knowledge can be composed of scientific judgments independent of judgments of "worth for us." The other, and not immediately epistemological, consequence of the recognition of the communal nature of religious knowledge was Ritschl's refusal to accept the New Testament as an accurate transcript of the words of Christ and their right interpretation. Rather, he argued — in incredibly modern language — it is a wholly human document recording the response of a community to an event toward which it felt a religious relation, _i. e._, concerning which it made the primary value-judgment, "This is God." From this Ritschl concluded that

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[67] *Ibid*., p. 4.

[68] *Ibid*., p. 139; *cf*. pp. 110ff.

> "the material of the theological doctrines of forgiveness, justification, and reconciliation is to be sought not so much directly in the words of Christ, as in the correlative representation of the original

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[69] Albrecht Ritschl, _Instruction in the Christian Religion_, trans. Alice Mead Swing in Swing, _The Theology of Albrecht Ritschl_, p. 200n. _Cf_. _Justification and Reconciliation_, p. 3.

> consciousness of the community. The immediate object of theological cognition is the community's faith that it stands to God in a relation essentially conditioned by the forgiveness of sins."[70]

Thus, if nothing more, Ritschl's concern with the communal structure of religious faith was a reaffirmation of his conclusion that natural theology is both impossible and non-religious. It is only when the theologian stands within the faith of the community, recognizes that the record of that community is not an infallible text-book but itself a communal response, and then makes a value-judgment concerning the central event of that communal history — a judgment which does not pretend to give theoretic or metaphysical knowledge — it is only then that the theologian can appropriate for himself the religious relation of reconciliation. Grounded not in impossible and undesirable metaphysical proof, but in the mere act of decision, this appropriation gives, for Ritschl, a viable religious knowledge, namely, that Christ has the value of God for me and in Him I am justified.

Theory of Religion: Ritschl approached his theory of value-judgments through another, less complex route than his separation of theoretic and religious knowledge. The collapse of the "amiable conclusion" that religion is the concern with the unity in experience compelled Ritschl to formulate not only a new rule dividing theoretic and religious knowledge but also a new theory of religion.

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[70] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Whereas the old definition had conveniently supplied one formula solving both issues, in the third edition the two matters while closely related are sufficiently separate to stand or fall independently. It is to this second approach to value-judgments, through Ritschl's final theory of religion, that our attention now turns.

This simple argument opens with an observation of "the contradiction in which man finds himself, as both a part of the world of nature and a spiritual personality claiming to dominate nature."[71] Bound to and limited by the fact of his creatureliness, man as a spirit feels that his destiny includes transcendence of that finitude. Ritschl proceeded to make the difficult leap from the force and universality of this conviction of human superiority to the postulate of a spiritual power which vouchsafes that dominion for man. The dilemma which arises for man when he recognizes his own inability to transcend his environment can be resolved only by the postulate of a transcendent saviour or technique adequate to compensate for man's natural lack. The illustrations which can be drawn from non-literate religions as well as from the more literate forms are virtually beyond number; and because the facts lend themselves so facilely to this interpretation varieties of this view have been perennial favorites of the sociologists of religion. Bergson drew the illustrative picture of the primitive hunter who, oppressed by the natural contingencies of a variable wind and obscuring branches, transcended his finite condition by entrusting his arrow to a spirit postulated as sufficiently benevolent and powerful to ensure success beyond the merely natural norm. In such a religious act, and in its more complex counterparts in other religions, man shows that his basic relation to his gods is one of value and need rather than theory. Although Bergson's hunter may, later over a campfire, attempt to supply some sort of rational ground for his behavior by relating it to creation or order, the tale he then spins is, in Ritschl's terms, theoretic knowledge. As such, it is removed from his primary religious relationship which is based more on the need for help than on the desire for logical consistency.[72]

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[71] Ibid., p. 199.

Again it is difficult to locate the precise origin of this theory, While it may be that the immediate impulse again came from Lotze, it is difficult to fail to perceive that the theory is but little removed from the Kantian argument. Regardless of his criticism of Kant's theory, *i. e.*, that the notation that the moral law is God's law makes God quite accidental,[73] Ritschl followed the moral argument quite closely in the third volume:

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[72] The many difficulties involved in this theory spring to mind at once. A few of them will be discussed later in this chapter; here we are more concerned with the line of development taken by Ritschl's argument and the theological implications he found in it.

[73] *A Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, pp. 402-403, 409.

> "Hence we must conclude either that the estimate which spirit, as a power superior to nature, forms of its own worth — in particular, the estimate which it forms of moral fellowship, which transcends nature — is a baseless fancy, or that the view taken by spirit is in accordance with truth and with the supreme law which is valid for nature as well. If that be so, then its ground must lie in a Divine Will, which creates the world with spiritual life as its final end. To accept the idea of God in this way is, as Kant observes, practical faith, and not an act of theoretical cognition. While, therefore, the Christian religion is thereby proved to be in harmony with reason, it is always with the reservation that knowledge of God embodies itself in judgments which differ in kind from those of theoretical science."[74]

Here Ritschl, in affirming that these judgments based on need give knowledge, has gone beyond Feuerbach and Vaihinger whose arguments parallel Ritschl's except for the crucial reversal of the final step. It is perhaps more accurate to report that the lines of influence on Ritschl's theory of religion were drawn from a general appreciation in the nineteenth century of the postulate nature of the divine-human relation, than to attempt to trace the theory to any one predecessor. Although accepted in many quarters as the sacrifice of theology's noetic claims, for Ritschl, Bergson and others this psychological account of religion formed a bulwark defending religious knowledge.[75]

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[74] Justification and Reconciliation, pp. 224-225.

[75] The line which Ritschl, as opposed to Feuerbach, followed is suggested in C. C. Everett's excellent article on Kant's influence in theology: "When Kant affirmed that the truth of religion rests not upon intellectual arguments but upon postulates growing out of our recognition of the rightful supremacy of

The primary conclusion which Ritschl drew from this theory of religion was that since the religious relation is one of need, the only proper form of knowledge which it can produce must consist of value-judgments. From this new vantage ground he again lashed out at the religion of metaphysics:

> "Die religiöse Weltanschauung ist in allen ihren Arten darauf gestellt, dass der menschliche Geist sich in irgend einem Grade von den ihn umgebenden Erscheinungen und auf ihn eindringenden Wirkungen der Natur an Werth unterscheidet. All Religion ist Deutung des in welchem Umfang immer erkannten Weltlaufs, und zwar in dem Sinne, dass die erhabene Macht, welche in oder über demselben waltet, dem persönlichen Geiste seinem Werth gegen die Hummungen durch die Natur oder die Naturwirkungen der menschlichen Gesellschaft erhält oder bestätigt.
>
> Im Widerspruch mit diesem Ergebniss hat freilich die Annahme, dass Religion und Metaphysik eng zusammengehören oder aufs nächste mit einander verwandt sind, die weiteste Verbreitung. Am bezeichnendsten ist dieselbe in dem Satze ausgedrückt, dem man oft genug begegnet, die Religion sei die Metaphysik des Volkes!"[76]

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the moral law, his assumption was that the law has for man such worth that it must be accomplished at whatever cost; and that whatever is necessary for this must be assumed to exist. It was thus the worth of the moral law that furnished the ground for his postulates. From this we may logically infer, first, that if our sense of the worth of any particular result be sufficiently strong, we may postulate whatever is necessary to the accomplishment of it. In point of fact the moral law may be the only thing that has sufficient worth for such unquestioning postulates. Whether this is so or not, experience alone can show. This, however, remains true, that according to the degree of worth which we find in any desirable result, just in that degree will the postulates concerning it have force." ("Kant's Influence in Theology" The New World VI, No. 21 (March, 1897), 75-76.) The word "force," of course, begs the real question of whether the postulates have "truth" or "validity." To mean that they have only "force" is to follow the line singled out by Vaihinger; to go beyond this to say that the act of postulation is validly noetic is to follow Ritschl.

[76] Theologie und Metaphysik, pp. 9-10.

Ritschl repeated in this argument the reason for metaphysics' failure in religion: "Wenn Gott in oder über der Welt die Macht ist, welche der Mensch verehrt, weil sie sein geistiges Selbstgefühl gegen die Hemmungen aus der Natur aufrecht erhält, so gehört kein Gedanke von Gott in die Metaphysik, da deren Erkenntnisse gleichgiltig gegen den Art- und Werthunterschied von Geist und Natur sind."[77] That is to say, because the religious relation is one of need, the knowledge gained in that relation can only give worth for us, i. e., can consist only of value-judgments:

> "Knowledge of God can be demonstrated as religious knowledge only when He is conceived as securing to the believer such a position in the world as more than counterbalances its restrictions. Apart from this value-judgment of faith, there exists no knowledge of God worthy of this content. So that we ought not to strive after a purely theoretical or 'disinterested' knowledge of God, as an indispensable preliminary to the knowledge of faith..... The truth is that we can know the nature of God and Christ only in their worth for us."[78]

Again attacking natural theology, Ritschl observed that while there are many religions in which God is not known as creator there are none in which He is not the helper and protector of man, that even for the Greeks, much less for mediaeval Christianity, the Aristotelian actus purus was never God but only an obscure principle of metaphysics, unrelated to man's worshipping situation.[79]

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[77] Ibid., p. 11.

[78] Justification and Reconciliation, p. 212.

[79] Cf. Theologie und Metaphysik, pp. 9ff.

The implications of this theory of religion for Ritschl's Christology follow without difficulty. Since what is sought in all religion is relief from the oppression of finitude, what is found in Christianity is salvation in and through God's action in Christ. At this point Ritschlianism served as a check to the view of Christ as the great teacher and model who provides the standard of imitation by which man can save himself.[80] This Ritschlian exaltation of the Atonement is directly dependent on the concept of value-judgments as approached through the theory of religion. Thus,

> "The conception of God which is given in the revelation received through Christ, and to which the trust of those who are reconciled through Christ attaches itself, is that of a loving Will which assures to believers spiritual dominion over the world and perfect moral fellowship in the Kingdom of God as the summum bonum."[81]

That trust (a term for the ultimate value-judgment) is the center of religious cognition is echoed by William Adams Brown who, in speaking for Ritschl, wrote that "whether God be, metaphysically speaking, absolute or not is a matter of trifling importance, provided he delivers man from his sorrows and saves him from his sins."[82] The dependence of the Ritschlian Christology on value-judgments approached through the theory of religion was painted in almost crude lines in Mozley's citation from Herrmann who, at this as at most points, was in full accord with his leader:

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[80] Cf. his attack against the popular "biographies" of Jesus.

[81] Justification and Reconciliation, p. 326.

[82] William Adams Brown, The Essence of Christianity: A Study in the History of Definition (New York, 1913), p. 237.

> "Herrmann allows that we should not have a Redeemer in the man Jesus unless we could go on to predicate Godhead of Him, but this, he says, 'does not imply that we must have acquainted ourselves with the proposition of Christ's Godhead before we can find the Redeemer in Christ. Much rather because He Himself becomes effectual to us for our redemption do we recognize His Godhead.'"[83]

Similarly, the theory of religion had a strong influence in determining the prominent position which Ritschl accorded to the Kingdom of God. The primary religious fact of the Christ-event is that from it flowed a community which, convinced that it had transcended the natural limitations, looked back to the founding event and recognized in it the presence of the divine.[84] Although Ritschl's reflections on the Kingdom of God surged far beyond these humble beginnings to form the second half of Justification and Reconciliation, it must be remembered that the primary aspect under which Ritschl viewed the Kingdom was as the community which had achieved the goal of all religious hope, viz., spiritual freedom from bondage to nature.[85]

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[83] John Kenneth Mozley, Ritschlianism, an Essay (London, 1909), p. 49.

[84] In view of the identity of our second author, the famous James-Lange theory of the emotions is an interesting parallel to the seeming inversion of things in the Ritschlian analysis of religious experience.

Concept of "The Thing": Thus, the two major routes by which Ritschl argued to his theory of value-judgments were the separation of theoretic and religious knowledge and the theory of religion. A third and more tortuous route, which is not so much an argument as a sort of hastily fabricated strut, is supplied in the attempt to compose a concept of "the thing." It is here that Ritschl's inadequacies as a philosopher are most apparent, and here also that one's exposition of the theory is most nearly woven out of one's own cloth. It is quite possible that in the last years of his life Ritschl was drifting toward a Lotzean metaphysic, as indeed he reported that he had already reached it. The fact is, however, that Ritschl hardly followed Lotze to his more important conclusions, and that the reader is left with what Ritschl wrote rather than what he intended to write or might have written.

The written record opens with an historical survey of metaphysics-epistemology which delineates three major alternatives: the Platonic, the Kantian, and the Lotzean.[86] The Platonic view, "the idea that the thing works upon us, indeed, by means of its mutable qualities, arousing our sensations and ideas, but that it really is at rest behind the qualities as a permanently self-equivalent unity of attributes," is particularly prominent in the scholastic concern with the operations, attributes and essence of God. Observing the difficulties which this theory has had in combining the immutability of God with present divine activity, Ritschl asserted that the alleged thing-behind-its-qualities is actually a "stationary memory-picture" of repeated perceptions. The Kantian alternative, declaring knowledge of the Dinge an sich to be impossible, stands as the necessary criticism of the scholastic-Platonic error. But, to the extent that critical idealism posits a noumenal world behind the phenomena of experience it both repudiates its critical work and falls back into the Platonic pattern. The proper understanding of the matter is contained in the view which Ritschl attributed to Lotze — although he could have found it in any number of authors — a view asserting the real presence of the thing in its effect and denying the existence of an essence subsisting behind those phenomena.

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[85] Illustrative of the view that this was always Ritschl's primary orientation to the Kingdom is his one aberrant effort to prove the superiority of Christianity by arguring that in the Kingdom men have achieved spiritual dominion to a greater extent than in any other religious community.

[86] Justification and Reconciliation, pp. 18-20. This account is paralleled in Theologie und Metaphysik, pp. 32ff.

The purpose of Ritschl's effort here is again to attack any theology built on a mystical or metaphysical ground, and to assert the relational character of all religious knowledge. This is illustrated in the quarrel with his perennial foil, Frank:

> "Denn ein Ding an und für sich wäre unserer Wahrnehmung und Vorstellung unzugänglich. Wenn nun endlich nach Frank's Anweisung seinem Absoluten, das er für die christliche Grundvorstellung von Gott ausgiebt, die Prädicate Persönlichkeit und

> Liebe anzuheften sind, indem man sie 'in die Sphäre Gottes erhebt', so wird sich das nicht gut leisten lassen. Denn beide Prädicate drücken Beziehungen auf Anderes aus."[87]

In all of this Ritschl's appeal is to Lotze as the author of a metaphysic which will provide the formal framework for theology and yet avoid the false conclusions of Platonism. The reason for Ritschl's rejection of pure Kantianism at this point is clear enough: if the noumenal world subsists behind the phenomenal (and Ritschl felt that the former was "more real" than the latter) then God can hardly be truly present in Christ, nor can He be the immediate object of human value-judgment or a real part of religious experience. In Lotze, on the other hand, — although he could have discovered this in any of a number of Neo-Kantians — he found double value: the Kantian critique of scholastic Platonism, viz., that all knowledge is limited to phenomena; and the further assertion that the object of that phenomenal knowledge is the "real" thing. Thus, Ritschl found a line of philosophic reasoning capable of including his contention that God is really present in Christ and truly the object of value-judgments.

Why Ritschl turned to Lotze and not another at this point has introduced a considerable amount of confusion, in view of his failure to proceed to Lotze's other conclusions. The propinquity of this colleague is perhaps the only discoverable reason. "Lotze, however, advanced beyond Kant, to the extent of endeavouring to vindicate for the theoretical reason a knowledge of things-in-themselves; but here he is not followed by Ritschl."[88] It is in his assertion that reality is "soul-like" that Lotze made his primary break with the main stream of Neo-Kantianism. Ritschl's failure to follow Lotze down this path was of primary importance for Dr. Garvie's contention that value-judgments lead to subjectivism: "the phenomenalism of our knowledge, which Lotze admits, must lead us to subjective idealism, or the denial of any reality save our subjective states of consciousness, unless we supplement the results of our epistemology by a metaphysical assumption that reality is 'soul-like' 'being for self.'"[89]

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[87] Theologie und Metaphysik, p. 20.

It is not entirely true that Ritschl completely ignored Lotze's interest in the soul-like character of reality. In two passages in Theologie und Metaphysik he appears to have flirted with the theory briefly. Troubled by the fact[90] that although no two perceptions of it are ever the same, man yet feels that he sees but one moon, Ritschl argued that the impression of identity is conferred on the thing by analogy with the soul:

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[88] Stählin, Kant, Lotze, and Ritschl, p. 184.

[89] Garvie, The Ritschlian Theology, p. 44. There would seem little ground for Mozley's feeling (John Kenneth Mozley, Ritschlianism, an Essay (London, 1909), pp. 255-256) that Ritschl's theory of value-judgments does not cohere well with his Kantian-Lotzean analysis of "the thing." Such as it is, this analysis — in restricting knowledge to phenomena and undercutting an "essence-metaphysic" — does accord with the view that all religious knowledge is concerned with worth for us, although it is not as reliable an argument as the two major ones cited above. Mozley's misunderstanding proceeds from his mistaken view that value-judgments are capable of giving objectively true knowledge of the thing-in-itself. It is extremely difficult to appreciate this interpretation of Ritschlianism.

> "Die Erscheinungen, welche in einem begrenzten Raumbilde in der immer gleichen Lagerung oder Reihenfolge, und deren Veränderung in einer bestimmten Grenze und Ordnung wahrgenommen werden, fasst unsere Vorstellung zu der Einheit des Dinges zusammen *nach der Analogie mit der erkennenden Seele*, welche in dem Wechsel ihrer entsprechenden Empfindungen sich als dauernde Einheit fühlt und erinnert."[91]

But this is psychology, and Lotze's soul-like reality is metaphysics. It is conceivable that in time Ritschl would have adopted such a metaphysic, moving even closer to Lotze; but by the publication of the third edition the soul-like reality theory had been borrowed only *ad hoc* to explain a minor point in the theory of things. In turn, the analysis of *das Ding* appeared as a tardy attempt to give further ground for the more prominent theory of value-judgments.

This brief reconstruction of Ritschl's sole flight into constructive metaphysics closes our survey of the case he presented in behalf of value-judgments. Following a convenient, but weak, formula separating religious and theoretic knowledge in terms of their objects, Ritschl proceeded to a more stable division in terms of the knowing subject. If metaphysics is limited to a causal explanation of events, the experienced reality of spirit must be grasped by a function of mind capable of dealing with value. The act of "judging according to worth", he argued, is such a function, is the only technique by which man can deal adequately with spirituality, and hence is the only means by which any truly religious knowledge is possible. Further, since the business of religion is concerned with establishing man's dominion over the natural order, it is primarily concerned with value and is not approachable by any route which begins, and hence ends, in the world of nature. If man is to have religious knowledge he can have it only through value-judgment, his decisive assertion of trust which finds from within the natural sequence a revelation, transcending that order, which yet gives veridical knowledge of the divine object. A number of the assets and liabilities of this unorthodox theory of religious knowledge will occupy our attention through the remainder of this chapter.

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[90] A fact which later, presented by the Gestaltists Wertheimer and Köhler in an inverted, laboratory form as the *phi* phenomenon, was to give serious trouble to the Behaviorists.

[91] *Theologie und Metaphysik*, p. 19 (italics mine). *Cf. ibid.*, p. 38, and Stählin, *Kant, Lotze, and Ritschl*, pp. 173-174.

CRITICAL EVALUATION: Assets and Liabilities of the Value-Judgment

The patent assets of the Ritschlian epistemology are many and clear to a generation now long familiar with "crisis experience" and "existential concerns." In very general terms, it can be said that the Ritschlian epistemology compelled theology to become personal, to deal with the "person" and his religious experiences; this is similar to the phrase employed above, that Ritschl felt the need to deal with the fact of spirit "in its integrity." The integrity of religious experience, of course, was not insisted on _in abstracto_, but, in a situation not unlike that of the patriarch of existentialism, as opposed to the oppresive weight of absolute idealism. Born into a generation which, through the rational synthesis of all experience, found religion to be the metaphysics of the folk, Ritschl expressed through his epistemology the conviction of those common people that their experience was more far-ranging than the Hegelian formula and that consequently the realities in their lives extended over a broader area. This is to say, in rough terms, that the _experienced_ is the real — but to say it in an era which had been taught that the _rational_ is the real.

Whatever his opinion of the ultimate outcome of its epistemology, the most hostile critic of Ritschlianism was forced to concede that its impetus embodied, or at least paralleled, the felt needs of the religious community. Theology must begin with the person, where he is — in his present on-going experience, for when it centers its attention elsewhere, on formulas, structures, or syntheses, it leaves the person behind and rapidly becomes irrelevant. The Ritschlian epistemology, in its protest against an oppressive rationalism and in its attempt, through the theory of value-judgments, to make something of the truly experienced act of "judging according to worth," formed the protest that religion must begin with the person and that only thus can it be relevant to experience.

But this is to construe Ritschlianism solely as a revolt against Hegelianism, a view widely held by his commentators and not without some ground. But in addition to its insistence on the validity of individual religious experience — an insistence having considerable positive import as well as its value as protest — the Ritschlian epistemology has numerous individual insights which are instructive. Foremost among these is the recognition that in any communication there must exist a common ground of agreement from which discussion can proceed. An age, long accustomed to virtual unanimity within one framework, inevitably tends to forget the need for this common ground; thus any monolithic in-group inclines to consider the members of an out-group not merely "different," but *wrong*. Now, it is hardly justifiable to portray Ritschl as a convinced relativist; yet, it must be contended, the seeds of such a position are often implied in his theory of value-judgments. Indeed, they occasionally appear above ground, as in this passage from *Theologie und Metaphysik*:

> "Und wenn wir Christen das entgegengesetzte Urtheil fällen, so geschieht es nicht aus einer richtigeren metaphysischen Erkenntniss, die nicht nachzuweisen ist, sondern aus einer entgegengesetzten religiösen Weltanschauung, deren ausschliessliches Recht nicht nach einer in allen Menschen gleichen Vernünftigkeit, sondern deren Geltung für uns Christen nach ganz anderen Gesichtspunkten bewährt wird, für welche aber ein Buddhist schwerlich zugänglich ist."[92]

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[92] P. 15.

If the ground for attributing divinity to Jesus of Nazareth lies in the free judgment that in Him the limitations of oppressive nature have been transcended, then clearly the man whose affirmation of worth lies elsewhere can hardly be compelled to assent to the Christian formula.[93] This can be the case because, in the separation of theoretic and religious knowledge, Ritschl withdrew from theology any argument leading to and supporting the primary judgment. If argument were employed as undergirding faith then religious trust would have as its object not a transcendent deity but the argument itself — or, more accurately, the saving powers of human reason. This ungrounded (except in the decisive value-judgment), and even circular, character of theology is illustrated in the Christology of Justification and Reconciliation:

> "The origin of the Person of Christ — how His Person attained the form in which it presents itself to our ethical and religious apprehension — is not a subject for theological inquiry, because the problem transcends all inquiry. What ecclesiastical tradition offers us in this connection is obscure in itself, and therefore is not fitted to make anything clear. As Bearer of the perfect revelation, Christ is given us that we may believe on Him. When we do believe on Him, we find Him to be the Revealer of God. But the correlation of Christ with God His Father is not a scientific explanation. And as a theologian one ought to know that the fruitless clutching after such explanations only serves to obscure the recognition

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[93] To be sure, Ritschl was not always consistent here, for he often suggested that any sensible man, given the opportunity, would make the Christian affirmation. Yet, although he never pressed the theory of value-judgments to a consistent relativism, the roots of such a development are present.

of Christ as the perfect revelation of God."[94] Because "the correlation of Christ with God His Father is not a scientific explanation" it cannot be forced on the pure historian who must yet assent that a man called Christ was crucified; but because it is not thus dependent, theology is more relevant, personal, and (if this may be allowed) "existential." Observing that all discussion must begin at some point and on a common ground, Ritschl perceived that in theology the site of that ground is also the location of the object of religious trust.

The liabilities of the Ritschlian epistemology have been as widely debated as its assets. Apart from the changes between editions and the various "tendencies" pictured as resulting therefrom, Ritschlianism is fraught with specific, detailed contradictions. Two illustrations will indicate that, even in the third edition, Ritschl's system was far from consistently organized. Firstly, E. S. Brightman has pointed out three uncorrelated criteria of truth within Ritschl's theory of knowledge: 1) "that is true which the community believes;" 2) "that is true which satisfies our active ethical nature;" 3) "that is true which is given in immediate experience."[95] Although these three strains can no doubt be coordinated, as Brightman observed, this work was not done by Ritschl in any of the three editions.

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[94] Justification and Reconciliation, pp. 451-452 (italics mine).

[95] Edgar S. Brightman, "Ritschl's Criterion of Religious Truth," American Journal of Theology, XXI, No. 2, 221.

A second, and more glaring, contradiction appeared in Theologie und Metaphysik in connection with the relation between religion (particularly Christianity) and epistemology. In the early part of the fifth section of this small book he wrote:

> "Aber in dieser Hinsicht ist jeder Theolog als wissenschaftlicher Mann genöthigt oder verpflichtet, nach einer bestimmten Theorie der Erkenntniss zu verfahren, deren er sich bewusst sein und deren Recht er nachweisen muss."[96]

But six pages later:

> "Denn da dasselbe neutral ist gegen die Unterschiede zwischen jüdischer und hellenischer Sitte, so ist es (Christianity) auch als Religion neutral gegen die verschiedenen Erkenntnisstheorieen, durch welche sein Gedankengehalt wissenschaftlich geordnet werden mag."[97]

Garvie concluded that this type of contradiction demonstrates that here Ritschl "was not quite clear in his own mind upon the question, and that therefore, without any deliberation or intention on his part, his statements represent the attitude of the moment rather than any consistent position."[98] The source of this lack of mental clarity on the subject is not difficult to appreciate: if, on the one hand, Ritschl were to have argued the second position consistently throughout, he would have been deprived of his argument against the first and second epistemologies ("Platonic" and "Kantian") which formed the ground of his attack against the Hegelian Absolute and the Platonic unio mystica; if, on the other hand, he had maintained only the first position it could have been done only at the expense of the primacy of religious faith. The first alone leads to the very thing he was fighting; the second to an equally undesirable, literalistic Biblicism. A patent contradiction is hardly an adequate solution to this type of dilemma, yet it does indicate that he was aware of the difficulties involved in either position. History (in the form of his critics) solved the problem by ignoring the second statement but then, in centering their attention solely on the first position, insisting that he was as guilty as his opponents in subordinating the Christian revelation to a specific philosophic system.

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[96] P. 40.

[97] P. 46.

[98] Garvie, The Ritschlian Theology, p. 39.

Of a piece with these specific contradictions is Ritschl's frequent and irritating refusal to use his own method. Apart from his often remarked, wholly transcendental deduction of the Kingdom of God from the love of God, Ritschl fell victim to the temptation to construct a Christian apologetic.[99] It would seem that the theory of value-judgments, particularly as approached through the separation of theoretic and religious knowledge, would prohibit any judgment from without concerning the relative worth of different religions. But, approaching the matter from his theories[100] of religion, Ritschl succumbed to the apologetic lure and argued to the "pre-eminent excellence" of Christianity in view of its capacity to answer most adequately man's need for spiritual dominion and a unified view of the world. This conclusion might have been quite consistent had Ritschl marked out only one route to the theory of value-judgments, but to the extent that he relied on his separation of theoretic and religious knowledge such an apologetic was unjustified. It would seem, further, that no amount of reworking of the conclusion could justify it without a basic revision in the description of the value-judgment. This is to suggest again that if pressed consistently the theory of value-judgments must lead to religious relativism.

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[99] It need hardly be observed that this apologetic side of Ritschlianism stands in direct contradiction to his recognition of the committal, and hence arbitrary (grounded only in itself), structure of religious knowledge as exemplified in the theory of value-judgments. Cf. supra, pp. 61-63.

It should no longer seem alarming to the reader now cognizant of Ritschl's many inconsistencies that less than ten pages from one statement of this apologetic there stands a passage which, recognizing the committal nature of value, asserts the relativity of all comparisons between religions:

> "we have to consider that several religions, such as Christianity and Islam, claim to occupy the highest stage above all others; and that Buddhists and Hindus who have become acquainted with Christianity put forward reasons which are meant to demonstrate the superiority of their faiths over the Christian. When, therefore, as Christians, in reviewing the series of stages presented by the religions of the world, we judge them by the principle that Christianity transcends them all, and that in Christianity the tendency of all the others finds its perfect consummation,

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[100] At this point he was arguing both the old and the new theories of religion. Cf. Justification and Reconciliation, pp. 202-203; H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation (New York, 1941), pp. 29ff.

> the claim of the science of religion to universal validity may seem to be sacrificed to the prejudice arising from our own personal convictions. But it is aimless and impractical to attempt to prove the universal validity of the view that religions can be arranged in an ascending series. Do people expect to discover thus a way of demonstrating scientifically to a Mohammedan or a Buddhist that the Christian religion, and not theirs, occupies the highest rank?.... we have no such aim."[101]

It would seem that this passage is far more consistent with the theory of value-judgments and, to be charitable, that the opposed conclusion was but a temporary surrender to the perennial magnetism of apologetics.

The major defect of the Ritschlian epistemology which the critics leaped to point out is, they argued, that it leads directly to subjectivism. This contention, which came from all corners,[102] reflected more the fears of the critics than an adequate and sympathetic understanding of Ritschl's answer to the problem he saw facing theology. In short, the critics felt more inclined to live with the problem of how to make

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[101] Justification and Reconciliation, pp. 196-197.

[102] The form of the charge of subjectivism varied from bitter denunciation to calm statement of fact. Professor Denny argued that "We must, as rational beings, try to clear up to our own minds what is necessarily involved in the existence among men of a Person who has the religious value of God. Theologians who refuse to go beyond this are invariably found to cover, under the guise of a religious indifference to metaphysics, a positive disbelief of everything which gives Christ's Godhead an objective character." (Studies in Theology (6th ed.; New York, 1901), p. 14.) Professor Orr was more temperate: "It is, indeed, in itself a true and valuable thought, for their emphasizing of which all credit is due to Schleiermacher and Ritschl, —though assuredly it is not a new one — that the facts of Christianity can only be rightly understood from the standpoint of faith and experience of redemption. But a dangerous subjectivity is the result when the experience is substituted for the facts, and the latter are allowed to be stated and studied only in terms of the former. And this, it seems to us, is what the Ritschlian method really comes to." (The Ritschlian Theology, p. 53.) He was more explicit in his collected essays: "It may be, and is, contended (1) that Ritschl bases the knowledge of God, and with it the whole religious view, on purely subjective grounds;

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(2) that his theology is bound up with a theory of knowledge and of judgments of value which makes an unwarrented divorce between theoretic and religious knowledge, and imperils the objective character of the latter; (3) that even objective religious realities are held to be apprehended only in subjective relations, or as 'mirrored in the subject'; and (4) that the modes of apprehension of these realities are not limited by the strictly objective state of the case, but are moulded, shaped, heightened, coloured by religious feeling and imagination, in the way that best suits subjective (religious) needs." (Ritschlianism; Expository and Critical Essays, p. 104.) If one allows the problem to be set up in this way, H. R. Mackintosh's analysis is devastating: "If we make explicit the syllogism which lies at the basis of Ritschlianism, it runs somewhat as follows: What is of (supreme) religious value is real. God is of (supreme) religious value, ergo God exists. The argument depends for its very existence upon the previous conclusion that intellectual experience has utterly failed to bring us within sight of the Divine.....The theory of knowledge has walled up the self in ontological seclusion, and if it is ever to escape to the sphere of supersensible reality, it can only be by a tour de force. We are to conclude from a desire which we find within us to the reality of its corresponding object — a desire in support of which we have not a single reason to offer. Our heart must remain satisfied with an ideal which we cannot know to be real." (H. R. Mackintosh, Some Aspects of Christian Belief (New York, 1924), pp. 145-146.) (For other statements of this criticism one may consult George Galloway, Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (London, 1904), p. 324; George Galloway, "The Theology of Ritschl," The Presbyterian Review, X, No. 38, 204-205; Pfleiderer, The Development of Theology, p. 183; H. R. Mackintosh, Some Aspects of Christian Belief, pp. 128, 148-149; Brown, The Essence of Christianity, pp. 259ff.) Professor Swing, one of the earliest American Ritschlians, was also one of the few critics who defended Ritschl against this charge of subjectivism. Cf. The Theology of Albrecht Ritschl, passim. But whatever the temper of their arguments, the hostile critics were not unaware of the worth of the line marked out in value-judgments. Their fear was the extremes to which they saw this line leading; thus their voices are better understood as ones of moderation rather than total rejection. As such, they are echoed by Orr: "We acknowledge an aspect of truth in the distinction of 'religious' and 'theoretic,' and in the doctrine of 'value-judging,' though we dissent absolutely from the divorce that Ritschlianism would set up between the two domains." (The Ritschlian Theology, p. 234.)

sense of religion in a scientific world than to accept the Göttingen solution. Observing that his first edition revision of the Kantian moral argument (viz., that it gives, not practical faith, but theoretic knowledge) provided the required objectivity in theology, they saw with alarm that the repudiation of this view, in combination with the new theory of value-judgments, led to the grounding of religion in the self rather than in a less variable method or fact, and hence to what they considered a complete subjectivism.[103] A few zealous supporters hurried to Ritschl's defence with the rebuttal that Christian knowledge is objective because it corresponds to an objective revelation; the critics soon pointed out the weakness here, viz., that the Ritschlian route to this "objective" revelation begins in, and hence is founded on, strictly subjective value-judgments. That is to say, the fact that the recognition of which revelation shall be "objective" is a subjective act casts a heavy shadow on that revelation's objectivity. The problem still remains, having but been pushed back one step.

In this respect, Ritschl's disciples stand historically as critics of his epistemology. Their common assent that religious epistemology is of primary importance in theology constitutes the sum of their agreement: the exact form which that epistemology should take was the greatest source of litigation within the Ritschlian school. Kaftan appears to have felt the subjectivism charge justified for he parted from Ritschl to assert that religious knowledge, far from consisting of value-judgments alone, is constituted by theoretical propositions ("existence-judgments") which are based on value-judgments. "According to Ritschl, religious knowledge never gets beyond the consciousness of its subjective certainty, whereas according to Kaftan it may attain a consciousness of objective validity, although reached only by subjective evidence; or to adopt a traditional distinction, according to Ritschl, πίστις remains πίστις to the end, while according to Kaftan πίστις may become γνῶσις, which, however, can never disown its beginning in πίστις."[104] It is difficult to perceive how this changes the problem substantially: the religious knowledge "reached only by subjective evidence" would seem to have, quite properly, only "subjective certainty." Another disciple, Bender, at Bonn, taking the other alternative, fully admitted the subjectivity of all religious knowledge. The hostile critics took this to be only the inevitable culmination of the Ritschlian movement in epistemology.

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[103] Orr, The Ritschlian Theology, p. 51n.

However, the ability to lodge a charge of subjectivism in part implies the possibility of another route capable of giving veridical knowledge of God. A few critics rested content with the descriptive statement that value-judgments never escape the realm of subjective consciousness; but many added the complaint that this was not enough. Actually, then, the point at which the latter parted company with Ritschl was not at the theory of value-judgments, but at his refusal to admit theoretic reason any constitutive role in religious knowledge. But if Ritschl is right, i. e., if theoretic knowledge can never be religious knowledge, then the cry "subjectivist" loses much of its force, and the problem is how to make the best of the new situation.[105] At best this is a difficult business. There is a great amount of trouble with the value-judgments of a lunatic. How assert that his, or any given revelation is "false"?[106] H. R. Mackintosh, the most keen of all of Ritschl's British critics, argued:

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[104] Garvie, The Ritschlian Theology, p. 178.

> "How do we know that any given personality is a revelation? If there are true revelations, presumably there are 'revelations' that are false. The only consistent answer possible on Ritschlian presuppositions — one of which is that the reference to spiritual being can be extracted only from a value-judgment — must be that we base our certainty that Jesus has truly revealed God exclusively on a judgment of worth. Jesus is to be appraised as the revealer of God, because what He brings to us is religiously valuable. But this is to argue in a very obvious circle. Revelation cannot communicate objectivity to the value-judgments of faith in general, if a value-judgment is the source of its own cogency. If our only outlook to the transcendent is through the judgment of worth, all that a 'revelation' can possibly effect is a modification of the meaning we ascribe to the words 'religiously valuable.' If value-judgments, in short, are true because of the worth of the objects they describe, no revelation is required to demonstrate their objective validity, for ex hypothesi that is already certain. If they are not, a revelation which draws

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[105] There is, perhaps, a parallel to all this in the Genesis controversy. It took a considerable time for this problem to become clear but once it had been recognized that the work was not intended as a text-book in natural science, the issue became not how best to lament the loss but how best to adjust to the changed circumstances and perceive the worth in them.

[106] Again, one suspects that a thorough-going relativism is the only consistent answer to such questions.

> all its persuasiveness from value-judgments is incapable of establishing their objectivity."[107]

The only reply that this reader of Ritschl can find to Mackintosh's analysis is to refuse to be led down this path. That is, refuse to "presume" that "there are 'revelations' that are false," and admit only that other revelations, which other men have found religiously valuable, are "different." To find one revelation (or, and it comes to this, one value-judgment) "true," and all others "false" is to imply that one has a standard of measurement which transcends all revelation. Again, the former alternative comes to a complete relativism in religion — and it may well be that this will not satisfy all men.

It is a very similar defect that is urged by those who discover in Ritschl an advocacy of the philosophy of the "double truth." Dr. Denny observed that:

> "Our religious convictions, if they do not have an objective value which is as real as that of our scientific convictions, and quite capable of being wrought into one intelligible whole with them, will simply pass away. The separation of the religious and the scientific means in the end the separation of the religious and the true (sic!); and this means that religion dies among true men."[108]

Wobbermin carried the trouble back to Kant:

> "However true this distinction (between theoretic and practical reason) may be in the abstract, it is, in the manner in which Kant carried it out, untenable. For with Kant the distinction of theoretical from practical reason led to a complete and mutually exclusively (sic) antithesis between the two. Theo-

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[107] H. R. Mackintosh, Some Aspects of Christian Belief, pp. 147-148.

[108] Denney, Studies in Theology, p. 15.

> retical and practical reason appear in Kant as two quite dissimilar provinces of the spiritual life of man, which have nothing at all to do with one another. And Ritschl and Hermann have accentuated the dualism still more."[109]

That Ritschl does furnish ground for the charge of "double truth" is evidenced in his discussion of Bernard of Clairvaux's partial anticipation of the Reformation:

> "....Bernard refers the good work (reconciliation) in its entirety to God's grace when viewed from the religious point of view, and to the freedom of the will rendered free by grace when viewed from the moral point of view. He has intuitively seized the twofold thought upon which evangelical Christianity is practically based, and in which evangelical theology must ever recognize it as her task to show the harmony, or at least the non-contradictoriness, of its two members."[110]

The means by which Ritschl proposed to prove "the harmony, or at least the non-contradictoriness" was, of course, his separation of theoretic and religious knowledge. The distinction was well stated by William Morgan:

> "But although our knowledge comes to us from two sources, it does not follow that there is a double truth. Faith and science cannot come into collision, for they have each their own sphere. Science deals with processes; faith with ultimate truth. There is no knowledge of God, or of the meaning and goal of the world, but that which faith brings. When reason with its natural categories attempts to solve the riddle of the universe, it oversteps its limits, and presents not truth but falsehood."[111]

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[109] Georg Wobbermin, "The Theology of Albrecht Ritschl and Its Significance for the Present Day," Yale Divinity Quarterly, IV, No. 3, 96. Cf. Orr, Ritschlianism; Expository and Critical Essays, p. 18; Mozley, Ritschlianism, an Essay, p. 248; Garvie, The Ritschlian Theology, pp. 190-191.

[110] A Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation, p. 96. The foes of the "double truth" reply, "But which is the true point of view?"

[111] William Morgan, "The Two Fundamental Principles of Ritschlianism," Expository Times, IX, No. 11, 491-492.

As in the previous case, this was not enough for the critics; because they failed to agree with Ritschl on the limitation of theoretic knowledge they were able to find "subjectivism" or "the double truth" in the constructive structure of his epistemology.

A parenthetic reflection concerning this problem of the objectivity of value-judgments can be put forward at this point. Ritschl's critics were essentially correct when they remarked that value-judgments can never rise to a level other than their source in subjective consciousness. (Kaftan does not appear to have gained any ground here.) It also seems plausible that at one time or another Ritschl would have been driven into the corner of the "double truth." But it is quite another thing to despair of the loss of all religion.

Two suggestions may be offered; the first is prompted by Morgan: "this moral certainty (with which value-judgments are held) is not a lower but a higher thing than the certainty founded on theoretical demonstration. A man will stake his life on it."[112] The very importance which a value-judgment has for the self must bestow on it some sort of status higher than "mere subjectivity." A serious value-judgment becomes an absolute for the self in that it becomes determinative for all action in a way that no scientific fact ever can. But this is to argue that the determinative is the objective, and at this point the lunatic becomes an unwelcome intruder. Yet one must contend that one's serious values stand as more than a private conversation with one's self.

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[112] *Ibid*., p. 492.

The lunatic, at least, can be dealt with in our second suggestion. Ritschl's emphasis on the community of believers suggests that although the theory of valuejudgments may lead to subjectivism, yet it is a *subjectivism within community*. It is not too great a leap from this to the notion of "*communal objectivity*" which provides a type of solidarity within a relativistic scheme. Whatever else he may be, the lunatic may at least be said to be "outside our community" (or we outside of his). One is then able to distinguish between positions and thus avoid a complete anarchy, and yet remain on a basis of relativism in value-judgments.

But it is quite possible that all this begs the question which is really asked, *viz.*, Do value-judgments give objectively valid knowledge? If the critic insists on this question, the Ritschlian has two possible alternatives. He can answer "no," if the question is taken as asking whether any impartial observer can be forced to accept knowledge gained by a specific value-judgment. On the other hand, he can reply that the question asked is not legitimate, if it is implied that there is some standard beyond the value-judgment whereby its validity can be measured. But it would seem impossible for the Ritschlian to answer "yes" to this question without completely twisting its meaning into a type of "communal objectivity" or "objectivity by importance," neither of which seems to apply here.

To return from this digression, the entire question of the status of value-judgments is perhaps best posed by Orr:

> "Seeing, further, that this idea of God (as an aid in man's quest for spiritual dominion) does not rest on experience, but is purely a 'postulate' of the spirit of man for its own ends, it is obvious that it can only be cast, just as in Kant's theory, in forms of subjective — i. e., figurative, symbolical, analogical — representations, which as such have no theoretical value. This may be dignified with the name of religious 'knowledge', but it is not knowledge in the strict sense of the word."[113]

Do value-judgments give knowledge? Is the answer to the question of Caesarea Philippi "knowledge"? Does the Muslim who finds the formula $\frac{M_1M_2}{d^2}(K) = G$ useful and yet says that "the Nile flows by the hand of Allah" know anything more than the law of gravitation? Ritschl's answer here is clear: the act of judging according to worth is noetic.

As in so many cases of this kind, the problem here would seem to hinge on the meaning assigned to the word "knowledge." Among the many possible definitions can be counted the view that whatever adds to our store of information, e. g., "the sunset is beautiful," may be termed an item of knowledge. If this very broad meaning be accepted then no one will contend that value-judgments do not give knowledge. But the very breadth of such a definition deprives it of usefulness. At the other extreme is the view that true knowledge consists only of the "publicly verifiable;" and here, where the emphasis is on public verification, there would seem to be no debate: Ritschlianism, with its arbitrary, ungrounded value-judgments, cannot claim knowledge in this sense. At least when he was most consistent, Ritschl never argued that the Buddhist should see what Peter saw at Caesarea Philippi.

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[113] Orr, The Ritschlian Theology, p. 74. The French school of "critical symbolism," not uninfluenced by Ritschlianism, appears to have accepted this distinction.

The issue returns to Ritschl's separation of theoretic and religious knowledge. If it is possible to hold theoretic and religious knowledge completely distinct, then the term "knowledge" makes little difference for, on the one hand, value-judgments are the sole source of knowledge in this area, and, on the other hand, as such they are incapable of measurement or comparison. To say that they give knowledge adds little to their description; the difficulty arises when a comparison between the two areas is attempted. But if the possibility of such a comparison is denied — as Ritschl must, and often does, deny it — and if it is maintained that value-judgments are the sole source of whatever cognition is possible in the sphere of religious experience, the problem does not present itself. But another does — and this is the point at which the critic must begin. Is this "private knowledge," or, at best, "communal knowledge" by value-judgment sufficient? Ritschl, finding it all the knowledge possible, also found it to be enough; the critics, finding it insufficient, argued that another form must be possible. Here again, the really revolutionary element in Ritschl's theory of knowledge was his separation of the religious from the theoretic.

Important as these considerations are for the outcome of the Ritschlian epistemology, an equally vital problem exists in the second route he followed to the theory of value-judgments. The final theory of religion adopted by Ritschl (God is that power postulated by man in order to achieve spiritual dominion) does not lead to God, but to man. Unlike those sociologies of religion which in giving a genetic account of religion do not necessarily invalidate its claims, by the very fact that he made valuing the crucial religious act Ritschl's argument makes it impossible for religion to be God-centered. The ultimate value-judgment, i. e., that judgment which forms the standard of all other judgment, must refer to the most cherished object. In Ritschl's formulation of the case in his final theory of religion, it refers to man.

Surprisingly, the anthropocentric character of this theory was remarked by few of the critics.[114] Charles M. Mead, following Pfleiderer's analysis, found the difficulty and observed that:

> "Religion, therefore, according to this, is not the attitude of the human soul towards a divine being already known or believed in, but is rather that relation of man to the world which makes him desire help in his conflict with it. God becomes, as it were, a sort of convenience; religion is the product of ill success in coping with natural difficulties. Religion is made to be primarily not a sense of dependence

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[114] Cf. H. R. Mackintosh, Some Aspects of Christian Belief, p. 131; Garvie, The Ritschlian Theology, pp. 162ff.; Orr, Ritschlianism; Expository and Critical Essays, pp. 21ff.; Pfleiderer, The Development of Theology, p. 185. However, a few of the critics (cf. H. R. Mackintosh, Some Aspects of Christian Belief, pp. 139ff.; Mead, "Ritschl's Theology," op.cit., p. 8; Robert Mackintosh, Albrecht Ritschl and His School, p. 167) have charged the Ritschlian theology with a hedonistic foundation. It seems clear that neither Ritschl nor Lotze intended a crass hedonism; but, in its broader sense, and in reference to the theory of religion, the charge would seem to parallel what we have described as Ritschl's anthropocentrism in this one argument.

> on God, but a sense of dependence on the world, in order to get deliverence from which a God is wished into existence. And the inevitable inference would seem to be, as Pfleiderer remarks, that the more the obstacles met with in the world are overcome by science and civilization, the less religion will there be."[115]

If a divine being is postulated in order to achieve a human value, viz., spiritual dominion, then the value, and hence the divinity, of that god is derivative, not ultimate. Or, inversely, if the most cherished object is, by definition, the god which a man worships in his actions, then the deity attained through the theory of value-judgments as based on the second theory of religion is man himself. A third statement of this problem would contend that the deity knowable by the value-judgments based on the argument from the separation of theoretic and religious knowledge, whatever its defects, are at least capable of transcending man's anthropocentrism, but that a theory of value-judgments which finds in God only instrumental value can never know more than man.[116]

One must not mistake the weakness in the second support of the theory of value-judgments for a fatal defect in the theory itself. Although it is far short of unanimous acceptance, the first support, i. e., Ritschl's separation of theoretic from religious knowledge, provides a much more acceptable ground for the theory of value-judgment. If religion is a scandal to reason, and if theoretic knowledge of God is not only impossible but "non-religious," then any explanation of man's relation to God must begin with the feelings and the will. Ritschl's concept of value-judgments is such an explanation. It may be that it contradicts the hopes of the pious and the faith of the reasonable. But if the general line of the premisses are recognized, what alternative is available? One is suggested by William James.

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[115] Mead, "Ritschl's Theology," op. cit., p. 9. Cf. Pfleiderer's article in Jahrbücher für protestantische Theologie, 1888, p. 180.

[116] A final minor objection against value-judgments has been raised by Ritschl's more mission-minded critics. If religious knowledge consists of value-judgments alone, no thorough-going apologetic for Christianity is possible, they argued. (Cf. Frank Hugh Foster, "Albrecht Ritschl," Presbyterian and Reformed Review, VIII, No. 31, 379; Mozley, Ritschlianism, an Essay, pp. 250ff.; Brightman, "Ritschl's Criterion of Religious Truth," op. cit., pp. 222-224.) Although Ritschl was not always consistent at this point, such does seem to be the inevitable conclusion from the character of the value-judgment. But to argue that this is a defect is to construct logic on wish.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER II

The most startling change in Ritschl's epistemology occurs in his discussion of the relation of religious faith and theoretic knowledge. Following Robert Mackintosh (Albrecht Ritschl and His School, pp. 176-192 — the pagination of Mackintosh's footnotes requires the revisions made in this appendix), we cite the following quotations as indicative of the rapidity and dogmatic character of the changes between editions and the contradictions arising from Ritschl's failure to complete the re-editing throughout the volume.

> "Wenn also ein Beweis für die wissenschaftliche Nothwendigkeit der Gottesidee eintreten soll, der nicht blos eine Reflexion aus der religiösen Weltanschauung auf ihren eigenen Zusammenhang wäre, so kann ein solcher nur auf unumgängliche Data des menschlichen Geisteslebens begründet werden, welche ausserhalb der religiösen Weltanschauung liegen, und entweder überhaupt keine Erklärung finden oder durch die wissenschaftliche Hypothese der Gottesidee. In der Beobachtung dessen, wie sich der menschliche Geist zu aller Naturwelt stellt, sind nun zwei analoge Thatsachen gegeben. Der Geist behandelt die Natur sowohl im theoretischen Erkennen als etwas, was für ihn da ist, wie auch in der Bethätigung des Willens als etwas, was direct Mittel zu seinem Zweck ist, der den Endzweck in der Welt bildet. Der Erkenntnisstrieb wie der Wille verfährt so ungeachtet dessen, dass die Natur ganz anderen Gesetzen folgt als er selbst, dass sie unabhängig von ihm da ist, dass sie ihn hemmt, und insofern ihn in gewisser Art von Abhängigkeit von sich hält. Entweder folgt hieraus, dass die Werthschätzung seiner selbst, in welcher der Geist als die Macht über die Natur verfährt, eine falsche Einbildung ist, oder der Geist verfährt so der Wahrheit gemäss, in Uebereinstimmung mit dem obersten Gesetz, welches für die Natur gilt; dann kann der Grund davon nur in einem göttlichen Willen erkannt werden, der die Welt auf den Endzweck des Geisteslebens hin schafft. Diese Annahme der Gottesidee ist kein praktischer Glaube, sondern ein Act theoretischer Erkenntniss."
>
> Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung, Dritter Band:

Die positive Entwicklung der Lehre,
Erste Auflage: 1874, p. 192, (italics
mine).

"Wenn also ein Beweis für die wissenschaftliche Nothwendigkeit der Gottesidee eintreten soll, so kann ein solcher nur auf unumgängliche Data des menschlichen Geisteslebens begründet werden, welche ausserhalb der religiösen Weltanschauung liegen, und entweder überhaupt keine Erklärung finden oder durch die wissenschaftliche Hypothese der Gottesidee. In der Beobachtung dessen, wie sich der menschliche Geist zu aller Naturwelt stellt, sind nun zwei analoge Thatsachen gegeben. Der Geist behandelt die Natur sowohl im theoretischen Erkennen als etwas, was direct Mittel zu dem gemeinsamen sittlichen Zweck ist, der den Endzweck in der Welt bildet. Der Erkenntnisstrieb wie der Wille verfahren so ungeachtet dessen, dass die Natur ganz anderen Gesetzen folgt als der Geist, dass sie unabhängig von ihm da ist, dass sie ihn hemmt, und insofern ihn in gewisser Art von Abhängigkeit von sich hält. Entweder folgt hieraus, dass die Werthschätzung seiner selbst, in welcher der Geist als die Macht über die Natur verfährt, insebesondere die Werthschätzung der sittlichen Gemeinschaft, welche über die Natur geht, eine falsche Einbildung ist, oder der Geistverfährt so der Wahrheit gemäss, in uebereinstimmung mit dem obersten Gesetz, welches auch für die Natur gilt. Dann kann der Grund davon nur in einem göttlichen Willen erkannt werden, der die Welt auf den Endzweck des Geisteslebens hin schafft. *Diese Annahme der Gottesidee ist kein praktischer Glaube, sondern ein Act theoretischer Erkenntniss.*"

Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung. *Zweite
verbesserte Auflage: 1883*, pp. 209-210,
(italics mine).

"Wenn also auf diesem Wege sich ergiebt, dass die christliche Idee Gottes anzunehmen dem wissenschaftlichen Erkennen der Welt nothwendig ist, so wird dieser Beweis direct auf unumgängliche Data des menschlichen Geisteslebens begründet, welche ausserhalb der religiösen Weltanschauung liegen, und entweder überhaupt keine Erklärung finden oder durch die Anerkennung jener Gottesidee. In der Beobachtung dessen, wie sich der menschliche Geist zu der Naturwelt stellt, sind nun zwei analoge Thatsachen gegeben. Der Geist behandelt die Natur sowohl im theoretischen Erkennen als etwas, was für ihn da ist, wie auch in der Bethätigung des Willens als etwas, was direct Mittel zu dem gemeinsamen sittlichen Zweck ist, der den Endzweck in der Welt bildet. Der Erkenntnisstrieb wie der Wille verfahren so ungeachtet dessen, dass die Natur ganz

> anderen Gesetzen folgt als der Geist, dass sie unabhängig von ihm da ist, dass sie ihn hemmt, und insofern ihn in gewisser Art von Abhängigkeit von sich hält. Entweder folgt hieraus, dass die Werthschätzung seiner selbst, in welcher der Geist als die Macht über die Natur verfährt, insebesondere die Werthschätzung der sittlichen Gemeinschaft, welche über die Natur geht, eine falsche Einbildung ist, oder der Geist verfährt so der Wahrheit gemäss, in Uebereinstimmung mit dem obersten Gesetz, welches auch für die Natur gilt. Dann kann der Grund davon nur in einem göttlichen Willen erkannt werden, der die Welt auf den Endzweck des Geisteslebens hin schafft. *Diese Annahme der Gottesidee ist, wie Kant bemerkt, praktischer Glaube, und nicht ein Act theoretischer Erkenntniss.*"
>
> *Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung. Dritte verbesserte Auflage: 1888*, pp. 213-214, (italics mine).

In the face of this unexplained reversal one critic cried:

> "Could anything be more significant, more ominous, than the famous 'not' in the third edition, where there was no 'not' in the first? The acceptance of the idea of God is at first 'no pratical faith, but an act of theoretic knowledge'; at last it is, 'as Kant remarks, practical faith, and *not* an act of theoretic knowledge.' Without the expense of altering a word in his premises, (as the reader can observe, this hyperbole is almost literally true) without abating in the slightest the characteristic arrogance of his logic, Ritschl simply reverses his conclusion. This is not obscurity, it is incoherence, and on this point it haunts us throughout the work. Thus on p. 616 of the translation (of the third edition), he assumes that it must be possible 'to harmonize the scientific study of nature and the Christian view of the world in the same mind' — as if he had forgotten to carry forward the 'not' to this point." (Denney, "Ritschl in English," *op. cit.*, p. 137.)

The obscurity is also present within individual editions. The early theory of religion (religion is man's concern with the unity of experience) was a product of the first edition. It was partially replaced in the second, and completely in the third. Thus:

> "every philosophy likewise combines the ambition to comprehend the universe under one supreme law."
>
> *Rechtfertigung und Versohnung*, 2te Auflage, p. 190.

3te Auflage, p. 194.
E. T. (3rd ed.), p. 203.

But the early theory lived on in the following unrevised passage:

> "the intermingling and collision of religion and philosophy always arises from the fact that the latter claims to produce in its own fashion a unified view of the world. This, however, betrays rather an impulse religious in its nature, which philosophers ought to have distinguished from the cognitive methods they follow."

Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung,
2te Auflage, p. 194.
3te Auflage, p. 197.
E. T. (3rd ed.), p. 207.
Cf. 1te Auflage, pp. 178-180.

It was even reinforced by the following passage which did not appear in the first edition:

> "The wish to comprehend the whole is itself something additional to disinterested science."

Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung,
2te Auflage, p. 201.
3te Auflage, p. 205.
E. T. (3rd ed.), p. 215.

A more detailed discussion of these and other passages, arranged in a triaglot, can be found in Cajus Fabricius, Die Entwicklung in Albrecht Ritschls Theologie von 1874 bis 1889 (Tübingen, 1909).

The inconsistency in Ritschl's revisions and the summary character of the changes he did make do not deprive his epistemology of all sense. But because they are so many and concern such important passages in the development of the theory,* and because the clues to a true interpretation are not always clear, one is left with the suspicion that to a large extent the Ritschl he has read is the Ritschl he has constructed. While this may be relatively true of a study of any complex thinker, in an analysis of the Ritschlian epistemology it rises to primary importance.

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*Perhaps the most astonishing passage in the wealth of material on Ritschlianism is Stuckenberg's statement of the sources employed in the preparation of his article: "The ref-

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erences to Ritschl's works are always made to the first edition. Numerous changes were made in the later editions, but they do not affect the essential elements of his system." (J. H. W. Stuckenberg, "The Theology of Albrecht Ritschl," American Journal of Theology, April 1898, p. 268n.)

CHAPTER III

WILLIAM JAMES: THE WILL TO BELIEVE

"The will to believe! To have recognized this element in every philosophy and to have proclaimed its legitimacy against all who disputed or deprecated it is, in my opinion, the greatest service which James has done us. It is also one of the most inspired observations that have gone into the structure of pragmatism."[1] Flournoy's eulogistic comment points to the limited area of discussion of this chapter: a study of that "most inspired observation" that what men want to believe plays no inconsiderable part in what they, as a matter of fact, do believe. The theory of the will to believe — to which this observation led James — and its use as a method of religious knowledge answer a number of perplexing problems and raise many serious questions which must be pursued here. Accordingly, the chapter is organized into a summary statement of James's situation, his relationships and their influences upon him; an account of his recognition of the collapse of rationalism, particularly of religious rationalism; a discussion of the proposed will to believe; and an analysis of a few of the questions it answers and some of those it creates.

James was so open to new thought and novel paths that circumscription of a study is particularly difficult: "he traveled with little baggage and with no inflexible itinerary, being singularly free, and wholly devoted to what he took to be the truth at the present moment of his thinking."[2] His attention ranged to art, hypnotic suggestion, and Philippine independence; yet there was a continuity that can be located in each of his ventures. It is not enough to term James a seeker after truth, for so, in his own way, is the most narrow of the doctrinaire; rather, he sought to find what truth there may be in human aspirations. It is on this thread that his openness to spiritism is related to his radical empiricism and his anxiety over free will. Our concern here is far less broad and, being somewhat less, is necessarily somewhat different. Whatever the arbitrariness, this chapter is basically concerned with that theory which James designated "the will to believe." Hence, the topic is narrower than James's epistemology, in some ways narrower than his pragmatism. It is inevitably a distortion of the whole man and even of his theory of religious knowledge, for that contained a strong, if late, attraction to mystical intuition as a means of divine-human encounter. Yet the continuity remains, for the entire concept of the will to believe is one effort to justify the status of human aspiration. In this way, then, isolation of a topic of study is not as distorting as it would be in a less constant thinker.

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[1] Th. Flournoy, The Philosophy of William James (New York, 1917), p. 167.

Perhaps the location of this topic may be marked out in terms of questions: What is the will to believe? Why is it felt necessary? If it be a true description of the epistemological situation, what is the character and status of knowledge so gained, and what is its relationship to knowledge reached by other routes? In working with these questions, the most helpful primary material has come, of course, from the essay, "The Will to Believe," yet this theme is found throughout James's works, particularly in those essays written at the turn of the century but even in the earlier Principles. A second major source is those sections, scattered throughout the Varieties, in which James discussed the relation obtaining between origin and value. These later, semi-defensive sections form an important supplement to the more aggressive mood of the earlier essays.[3]

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[2] Ralph Barton Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, (Boston, 1935), Vol. I, p. x.

RELATIONSHIPS AND THEIR INFLUENCE

A complete account of James's relationship to his contemporaries is beyond the scope of this chapter. A full report of the development of the theory of the will to believe, and the influences on that development, would be an interesting and complex study in itself. It should include a discussion of James's peculiar and influential relationship to his father, his brother, and his sister. It would have to take account of his illnesses, his travels, and the host of men from Emerson to Freud who played their part in forming the Jamesian complex. But this task will have to be undertaken elsewhere.[4] There is, however, one aspect of the accounts of James's development which must be mentioned here, namely the common view that James shifted from psychologist to philosopher about 1895. This thesis, developed by J. S. Moore in "The Religious Significance of the Philosophy of William James" for example, has only superficial justification. A careful examination of his diary and letters will indicate that James was as worried over free will and the right to believe in the 1870's as he was in the decade before his death. Perry has been quite explicit in criticism of this "stage-analysis" of James's development:

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[3] The reason for this type of topic-limitation is to make the subject-matter of the chapter manageable. Seen as a whole, the varying streams of James's thought are surprisingly complex and interrelated. Yet he, for one, felt that they were capable of separate consideration. Cf. a letter to Flournoy and personal notes of 1907: R. B. Perry, op. cit., (Boston, 1935), Vol. II, pp. 457, 479-480. Perry, arguing for the interdependence of pragmatism and radical-empiricism, conceded that they might be held independently (Ibid., p. 454). The hope in this chapter, then, is to avoid any separate consideration of mysticism, radical-empiricism, spiritism, etc., and to mention them only when they become inextricably involved in the theme of the will to believe. It should be recognized that this may do some violence to James; it may be then that this chapter is more a study of the will to believe than of its author.

> "It is sometimes supposed that there were two Jameses, James the psychologist and James the philosopher, and that the latter superseded the former sometime after 1890. Nothing could be further from the truth. Not only was James both philosopher and psychologist throughout his life, but he drew no sharp line between these two branches of knowledge. The result is that James's philosophical works contain psychology, and his Principles of Psychology contains philosophy."[5]

And again in the preface of his edition of the Collected

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[4] In large part this study has been completed by R. B. Perry and can be found in his monumental two-volume Thought and Character of William James. But there is a place for further, and even more detailed, research.

[5] R. B. Perry, op. cit., Vol. II, p. viii.

Essays and Reviews:

> "The recent reading and rereading of all of James's known writings have impressed two things very deeply on my mind. First, there was one and only one James from the beginning to the end....."[6]

It is important in any study to emphasize what may be termed James's "constancy," for his alleged rejection of psychology in favor of philosophy and religion has been taken on the one hand as a failure of nerve, and on the other as a turning from the "mundane" to the "spiritual." James would have been entertained by this partisan conflict, but he would have insisted that the arena of combat be grounded in fact. This debate is readily removed by an examination of James's miscellaneous writings.

As has been observed, the list of influences on James is astonishing. His facility with foreign languages opened for full communication a continent of thought normally only partially available to a busy thinker. For its illustrative value here, a partial catalogue of those contemporaries who have been suggested as important influences may be given without further comment: Henry James, Sr., Helmholtz, Bain, Mach, Fechner, Boutroux, Papini, Dewey, Schiller, Royce, Munsterberg, Chauncey Wright, Wundt and Spencer (the latter two having been used positively for facts but rejected for analysis). Yet this list is chosen at random from the secondary sources and could be amended by the names of a dozen equally important contemporaries. Such a list of contemporary influences would have to be supplemented by an account of his relationship to his predecessors: Kant, J. S. Mill, Hume, and the entire school of British empiricism. This is simply to say that William James was a very well traveled and widely read figure, but it also serves to underscore that most outstanding characteristic, his openness.

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[6] William James, Collected Essays and Reviews (London, 1920), p. ix.

Among his contemporaries there are four who deserve particular, although brief, notice in connection with a study of the will to believe, *viz.*, Lotze, Peirce, Renouvier, and Bergson. James's dependence on the works of Hermann Lotze is much remarked by his reviewers. Perry lists the positive influences as rejection of the nihilistic implications of associationism, the appeal of panpsychism, and "Lotze's notion that worth or validity (Lotze's *gelten*) is a radical principle irreducible to existence; that, in fact, things *are* what they are *worth*."[7] But, as Perry observes, James, in borrowing Lotze's insights, by no means adopted his system; it was Lotze's argument in behalf of monism that James chose to attack in *A Pluralistic Universe*.[8] Yet Lotze, in his openness to radical thought, provided important anticipations which James was happy to recognize.[9]

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[7] R. B. Perry, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 586-587. On the last point *cf.* Herbert W. Schneider's "William James as a Moralist" in *In Commemoration of William James: 1842-1942* (New York, 1942), p. 134.

[8] William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (New York, 1909), pp. 55-62.

[9] James's clearest statement of this anticipation occurs

The concept of the will to believe is tied by James to his acceptance of pragmatism; in effect it was little more than an extension of the pragmatic argument. As such, he found the work pioneered by his then obscure friend, C. S. Peirce. Although some have questioned whether the student may not have preceded the teacher,[10] James felt that he was only following a line marked out by Peirce and so announced in his famous California speech to Professor Howison's philosophical

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in connection with his theory of the will and appears in "Réponse aux Remarques de M. Renouvier, sur sa Théorie de la Volonté," published in *La Critique Philosophique*, 1888, nouv. série, 4me année, 2, and reprinted in *Collected Essays and Reviews*, p. 304; "Premièrement, en ce qui concerne mon originalite, Lotze a été, autant que je sache, le premier à formular clairement la relation entre représentation, volition et mouvement effectué. On trouvera les passages dans les §§ 266-7-8 de sa *Medicinische psychologie*, publiée en 1852. Votre propre formulation, qui n'est pas essentiellement plus profonde, à ce qu'il me semble, mais qui est beaucoup plus explicite, a été publiée sept ans plus tard, mais obtenue d'une manière independante. Mes propres idées se sont formées bien postérieurement, par la lecture et de votre ouvrage et de celui de Lotze; de sorte que je n'ai sur ce point ni indépendance ni originalité quelconque."

[10] *Cf.* W. H. Hill's persuasive "The Founder of Pragmatism" in *In Commemoration of William James: 1842-1942*, which argues that "if we choose to look for an original document in the history of pragmatism....we can find it in James's paper of 1878 in answer to Spencer" ("Remarks on Spencer's Definition of Mind as Correspondence," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, Jan. 1878, thus, if not antedating Peirce's essay, at least published in the same month)"....it is in this paper of James's, I think, that we find the origin of pragmatism, and the founder of pragmatism was its author" (p. 234). Dr. Hill does not appear to give particular weight to James's statement that he first heard the principle of practicalism enunciated in Cambridge in the early 70's (presumably at his philosophical club).

union.[11] Peirce, somewhat hesitant at being called the father of pragmatism, pointed to Nicholas St. John Green and Bain and, observing Bain's definition of belief as "that upon which a man is prepared to act," designated him the "grandfather" of the movement.[12] Ultimately, of course, James moved Peirce's theory of meaning toward a theory of truth so that, in combination with a number of changes in Peirce's thinking, Peirce felt obliged to repudiate "pragmatism" and to invent a new term for his own views. Whatever the historical circumstances, it was clear in James's mind that it was really from Peirce that he had derived the notion that beliefs are "rules for action; and the whole function of thinking is but one step in the production of habits of action." It is within this context that the will to believe was constructed.

Renouvier's influence on James's development is somewhat clearer.[13] Its importance for the will to believe is quite apparent in a diary notation dated April 30, 1870, recording James's emergence from a severe spiritual crisis:

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[11] "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results" (1898). Portions were reprinted in various works and the whole in Collected Essays and Reviews.

[12] R. B. Perry, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 407.

[13] Perry maintained that Renouvier's influence was the strongest. Cf. ibid., Vol. I, p. 655. It certainly appears to have had a marked effect in James's earlier years; whether the extent of that influence can be maintained through James's later years may be open to question.

> "I think that yesterday was a crisis in my life. I finished the first part of Renouvier's second 'Essais' and see no reason why his definition of Free Will — 'the sustaining of a thought because I choose to when I might have other thoughts' — need be the definition of an illusion. At any rate, I will assume for the present — until next year — that it is no illusion. My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will."[14]

What has been referred to as James's "openness" seems to have dated from this period and to have received its theoretic justification in an acceptance of Renouvier's fideism, later formulated as the will to believe. Although, after considerable correspondence, James and Renouvier grew apart, the student never failed to recognize his indebtedness to his teacher and friend, writing in one of their last letters:

> "I sent you a 'New World' the other day, however, with an article in it called 'The Will to Believe,' in which (if you took the trouble to glance at it) you probably recognized how completely I am still your disciple. In this point perhaps more fully than in any other; and this point is central!"[15]

He directed that his final systematic effort, an introduction to philosophy,[16] be dedicated "to the great Renouvier's memory."

Although James testified that it was Renouvier who, in the seventies, had freed him from the "monistic superstition" under which he had grown up,[17] it was in another Frenchman that he located a final justification for that escape. In spite of his own testimony, James probably found little new in Bergson; rather, he discovered there a confirmation of his own view that rationalism had died. Finding the Bergsonian "cinematographical" analysis of intellect strong support for his pragmatism in its critique of "vicious intellectualism," James filled A Pluralistic Universe with high praise of the philosopher of the élan vital, culminating in these sentences: "In my opinion he has killed intellectualism definitively and without hope of recovery. I don't see how it can revive again in its ancient platonizing rôle of claiming to be the most authentic, intimate, and exhaustive definer of the nature of reality."[18] The importance here is not that Bergson supplied James with a new foundation for his pragmatism and fideism (it was the view in many quarters that it was James that had "killed intellectualism definitively"), but that in offering corroboration of James's own instrumentalism he ended a wavering which had annoyed James for some time.[19] H. M. Kallen has recognized this distinction in summarizing the relationship between these two:

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[14] The Letters of William James, ed. Henry James, (Boston, 1920), Vol. I, p. 147. This passage also contains an interesting reference to Bain's theory of habit.

[15] Ibid., Vol. II, p. 44.

[16] Published posthumously by H. M. Kallen and Henry James, Jr. as Some Problems of Philosophy: A Beginning of an Introduction to Philosophy (New York, 1911).

[17] Ibid., dedication.

> "The effect of Bergson....was on the one hand to confirm William James in his opinions concerning the a-logical nature of reality and on the other to supply him with an authoritative criticism of intellectualism, to supplement his own, which, cogent enough to

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[18] A Pluralistic Universe, p. 215.

[19] James observed that before this corroboration of his view of the relation of logic and reality he had been "blackening endless pages of paper privately, in the hope of making ends meet that were never meant to meet." Ibid., p. 214.

> most of his friends and pupils, seemed to him insufficient. With respect to these general propositions, and to these only, may James be said to hold the Bergsonian philosophy, and with respect to these Bergson is as much a Jamesian as James a Bergsonian."[20]

Although he never quite succumbed to it, James undoubtedly also found the intuitive and mystical elements in Bergson's vitalism more than a little tempting. But the primary importance of Bergson for James — and particularly in relation to the will to believe — is, like that of Peirce, his confirmation of pragmatism's assertion of the collapse of rationalism.[21]

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[20] Horace Meyer Kallen, William James and Henri Bergson: A Study in Contrasting Theories of Life (Chicago, 1914), pp. 42-43.

[21] Although it is considerably removed from the burden of argument in this paper, there is a strong temptation to search out some connecting link between James and Ritschl. Because of the complexity of the German scene during the latter half of the nineteenth century and the seeming lack of any primary material, the following general items may be suggested as relevant to the obvious question. Simple chronology would appear to eliminate any influence from James to Ritschl; the more interesting side, particularly in view of Ritschl's importance, through Herrmann, for American theology, is the possibility of influence from Göttingen to Cambridge. Perhaps the most that can be said is that, in view of Ritschl's wide fame in his last years and in view of James's lengthy visits to Germany and his great interest in Neo-Kantianism, James most likely knew of Ritschl although he apparently made no extensive study of that theologian. (One should recall that Ritschl's epistemology and anti-Hegelianisms, and hence his most interesting side for James, are buried in a three-volume work on the Christian doctrine of justification and reconciliation and in a small, theologically polemical treatise.) Similarly, James had probably heard of the Ritschlians, Herrmann and Kaftan, although again there does not seem to be any mention in James of these names. However, an important work of the most extreme Ritschlian, Bender, was cited with some spproval in the concluding section of the Varieties. It is most instructive that James saw fit to translate from Das Wesen der Religion this highly Ritschlian — although not exclusively so — passage for his readers: "Religion is that activity of the human impulse toward self-preservation by means of which Man seeks to carry his essential vital purposes through against the adverse pressure of the world by raising himself freely

THE COLLAPSE OF RATIONALISM

> "The intellectualism in religion which I wish to discredit....assumes to construct religious objects out of the resources of logical reason alone, or of logical reason drawing rigorous inference from non-subjective facts."22

The concept of the will to believe, presupposing pragmatism,

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towards the world's ordering and governing powers when the limits of his own strength are reached" (p. 507). Another exciting clue can be found in the opening chapter of the same volume where James attempted to distinguish between an existential proposition and "*a proposition of value*, what the Germans call a *Werthurtheil*" and observed that "neither judgment can be deduced immediately from the other" (p. 4). But one must not be misled here; it is more probable that "the Germans" was a group name applied by James to that considerable portion of the Neo-Kantian complex in which *Werthurtheil* was a popular term, than that it was directed primarily at the Ritschlians. This reference to the philosophic background of Ritschlianism points toward the most fruitful line of inquiry into the connection of these two, *viz.*, through Lotze. It is in their mutual and admitted dependence on this Neo-Kantian, with his openness, his acceptance of ungrounded value, and his concern over the relation of religion and philosophy, that the general similarities between Ritschl and James find their root. Considering the prominence of Neo-Kantianism at the time and in view of the complexity of the relationship between its schools, further focusing of the relationship would seem extremely hazardous.

It is surprising that this relationship has been raised so infrequently by the students of either man. It has not, however, gone entirely unremarked, although what attention has been directed toward it has centered less on tracing the lines of connection than on recording the various theoretic similarities. Mozley's essay contains the most exhaustive list: "There is, of course, a connection between the Ritschlians, the Modernists and the Pragmatists. They agree in revolting from the excessive intellectualism of Hegel, and his comparative neglect of the category of will; they agree also in insisting that truth must not be presented as simply lying ready at hand for the seeker, but as sought and found in the effect it produces upon the seeker, so that, in some sense, he may be said to impose his will upon reality, and 'make' reality." (John Kenneth Mozley, *Ritschlianism, an Essay*, London, 1909, p. 244.) J. S. Bixler, a student of James, has observed that "Ritschl....makes close contacts with James in his discussion of value-judgments, his stress on the necessity of man's asserting his independence of the world of nature and creating his ideals in the world of spirit, in his assertion that belief in God is necessary to bring about the victory of the also presupposes the pragmatic attack against the traditional arguments of rationalism, or what James often termed "vicious intellectualism." The precise limits of what James alternately referred to as rationalism, absolutism, monism, and vicious intellectualism are not very clear; he tended, in his attacks, to group together Socrates, Plato, Hegel, Lotze, and even his friend Royce. This being the case, it may be suggested in a Jamesian phrase that what he saw arrayed against his pragmatism was more an "attitude of mind" than one explicit system. Observing a legitimate function for the intellectualization of experience, _viz._, as an aid in reducing the complex to the manipulable, James termed "vicious" that conceptualizing of experience that proceeds _beyond_ the instrumental. He focused his attack against the argument that intellect "has developed incidentally (to its original role) the function of understanding absolute truth; and life itself now seems to be given chiefly as a means by which that function may be prosecuted. But truth and the understanding of it lie among the abstracts and universals, so that the intellect now carries on its higher business wholly in this region, without any need

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moral ideal, and in his condemnation of the absolute as an idolatrous object totally unfit to be worshipped!" (Julius Seelye Bixler, _Religion in the Philosophy of William James_, Boston, 1926, p. 83.)

Again it must be observed that this digression is not a part of the argument of this essay: it is merely an interesting sidelight. James's partial resemblance to Ritschl no more means that he is guilty of the German's misadventures than it means that he can appropriate his further insights.

[22] William James, _The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature_ (New York, 1902), p. 433.

of redescending into pure experience again."[23] It is the flight of intellect away from particulars and the eventual, corollary flight of truth away from experience that characterize the attitude of mind which James opposed.

He recognized this rationalism as an escape to certainty by removal from the particularity of experience.[24] Referring to Hegel, but in a statement which extended beyond the one man, James summarized the goal of theintellectualist attitude:

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[23] "The Thing and Its Relations" (1905), A Pluralistic Universe, p. 351. Cf. ibid., pp. 60, 106, 218; Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking (New York, 1907), p. 200.

[24] James's attack against vicious intellectualism does not make him the irrationalist he is sometimes pictured as being. (This characterization has, perhaps, some weight when applied to the will to believe considered alone.) Far from deprecating all conceptualization of sensible experience, James argued that this was man's most potent tool and the primary means for improving the human condition. It is only when concepts are taken beyond their instrumental function that they become "vicious;" indeed, "only in so far as they lead us, successfully or unsuccessfully, into sensible experience again, are our abstracts and universals true or false at all." ("The Thing and Its Relations" (1905), A Pluralistic Universe, p. 353.) There are, moreover, in the second Hibbert lecture, several passages which suggest, however uncharacteristically, an alternate to the purely instrumentalist analysis of intellect: "May not the flux of sensible experience in itself contain a rationality that has been overlooked.....Some rationality certainly does characterize our universe; and, weighing one kind with another, we may deem that the incomplete kinds that appear are on the whole as acceptable as the through-and-through sort of rationality on which the monistic systematizers insist." (Ibid., pp. 73, 81. Cf. R. B. Perry, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 494-495.) Whatever other significance this latter observation might have, it does indicate that for James an attack against "vicious intellectualism" is far from the support of irrationalism.

> "a truth that should prove incontrovertible, binding on every one, and certain, which should be _the_ truth, one indivisible, eternal, objective, and necessary, to which all our particular thinking must lead as to its consummation. This is the dogmatic ideal, the postulate, uncriticised, undoubted, and unchallenged, of all rationalizers in philosophy."[25]

This program, in spite of its guarantor or culmination, the Absolute,[26] collapsed for James for many reasons. It is typical of the man that he should find the moral objections to the program weighing most heavily; but this must not suggest that his entire case was founded on ethical preference. James's brief is four-fold and embraces the logical problems and contradictions raised by excessive rationalism itself; the challenge of Darwinism; James's opposed description of the structure of conceptual knowledge; and his moral objections.

The strictly theoretic problems of excessive rationalism arose most clearly for James in his consideration of absolutism.[27] His objections are readily cataloged: absolutistic systems are absurd, useless, inconsistent, incomplete, contradictory, and incapable of solving the problem of evil. James asserted the absurdity of absolutism in a somewhat anthropomorphic judgment against the omniscience generally attributed to the Absolute: "....thinking this view consistently out leads one to frame an almost ridiculous conception of the absolute mind, owing to the enormous mass of unprofitable information which it would then seem obliged to carry."[28] The concept of the absolute is useless for deductive purposes: "Whatever the details of experience may prove to be, after the fact of them the absolute will adopt them. It is an hypothesis that functions retrospectively only, not propectively."[29] In his essay "On Some Hegelisms," James revealed some impatience with a basic inconsistency in the Hegelian program:

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[25] _A Pluralistic Universe_, pp. 100-101. _Cf._ _Some Problems of Philosophy_, p. 229.

[26] Which James once called the _deus ex machina_ of the rationalist's dilemma. _A Pluralistic Universe_, p. 72.

[27] Of course, one may be something of a rationalist without being a monist-absolutist. But this is precisely the problem encountered in defining James's opposition. He is clearly discussing Hegel and the Hegelians, and sometimes Royce, for these constituted the entrenched system against which pragmatism protested. It is difficult to establish what other forms of rationalism James would include in his attack. The difficulties listed immediately above would seem to apply primarily to monistic and absolutistic schemes; it is in his statement of the structure of conceptual knowledge that James's attack is levelled against all excessive rationalism.

> "Where you meet with a contradiction among realities, Herbart used to say, it shows you have failed to make a real distinction. Hegel's sovereign method of going to work and saving all possible contradictions, lies in pertinaciously refusing to distinguish. He takes what is true of a term *secundum quid*, treats it as true of the same term *simpliciter*, and then, of course, applies it to the term *secundum aliud*."[30]

James found any account of experience as a whole impossible. He bracketed himself with Lotze, Renouvier and his friend Hodgson in asserting that Hegel's effort to bridge the chasm to non-being had failed: "Absolute existence is absolute mystery, for its relations with the nothing remain unmediated to our understanding."[31] One of the most tidy arguments of the perennially "open" James was directed against the "closed" character of intellectualism's method which, he felt, opened its system to a contradiction:

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[28] *Ibid.*, p. 127. There is an interesting, but inverted parallel to this analysis in James's Ingersoll lecture. *Cf.* William James, *Human Immortality: Two Supposed Objections to the Doctrine* (2nd ed., Boston, 1899), pp. 31 ff.

[29] *A Pluralistic Universe*, p. 126.

[30] (1882), William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York, 1897), p. 280.

> "Intellectualism thus contradicts itself. It is a sufficient objection to it, that if a 'pluralistically' organized, or 'co-operative' universe or the 'melioristic' universe (described) above, were really here, the veto of intellectualism on letting our good-will ever have any vote would debar us from ever admitting that universe to be true."[32]

Whatever the merits of these several arguments, in his customary style James founded the bulk of his case on that problem which was most personally troubling, viz., the fact of real evil. It may hardly be an overstatement to say that the major philosophic consideration which drove James to pluralism and his concept of the finite god was the fact that, whether or not the good triumphs, good is hardly the only existent. He was unable to conceive how evil could be made compatible with the Absolute, and he was wont to term absolutism's efforts to combine them the new "irrationality." Although his detailed analysis of this problem is contained in the third chapter of A Pluralistic Universe, his finest summary statement appears in the Gifford lectures and deserves citation in full.

"If we admit that evil is an essential part of our

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[31] "The Sentiment of Rationality" (1879), The Will to Believe, p. 72. James did observe the existence of an "ontological emotion" of unity among a few mystics, but he also remarked its unsystematic character. Cf. ibid., pp. 74 ff.

[32] Some Problems of Philosophy, p. 225.

> being and the key to the interpretation of our life, we load ourselves down with a difficulty that has always proved burdensome in philosophy of religion. Theism, whenever it has erected itself into a systematic philosophy of the universe, has shown a reluctance to let God be anything less than All-in-All. In other words, philosophic theism has always shown a tendency to become pantheistic and monistic, and to consider the world as one unit of absolute fact; and this has been at variance with popular or practical theism, which latter has ever been more or less frankly pluralistic, not to say polytheistic, and shown itself perfectly well satisfied with a universe composed of many original principles, provided we be only allowed to believe that the divine principle remains supreme, and that the others are subordinate. In this latter case God is not necessarily responsible for the existence of evil; he would only be responsible if it were not finally overcome. But on the monistic or pantheistic view, evil, like everything else, must have its foundation in God; and the difficulty is to see how this can possibly be the case if God be absolutely good."[33]

This is, of course, the traditional, systematic problem of absolutism; for James it was an insuperable barrier which finally became determinative for his theory of religion.

The arguments enumerated above were employed by James primarily in a negative way: his concern was to demonstrate that the absolute is not a logically compulsory concept, that in fact it has a certain irrationality of its own and is, at best, only "an emotionally rather sublime hypothesis."[34] Still in a somewhat negative vein, but embodying some positive impulse away from absolutistic rationalism, was James's conviction that the challenge of Darwinism undercut any inference from order within the world to a transcendent power or agency above the world. James seems to have had a deep admiration for the argument from design; it is almost with reluctance that he dismissed it. But that he did dismiss it, and in quite clear language, can be shown from his lecture notes for Philosophy 3: "from the order of the world there is no path to God by coercive reasoning, or even by strong analogy or induction."[35] In preparing the ground for the conclusions of "Is Life Worth Living?" James tied this failure directly to the acceptance of Darwinism:

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[33] The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 131. Cf. A Pluralistic Universe, pp. 123ff.

[34] Cf. ibid., p. 128.

> "There were times when Leibnitzes with their heads buried in monstrous wigs could compose Theodices, and when stall-fed officials of an established church could prove by the valves in the heart and the round ligament of the hip-joint the existence of a 'Moral and Intelligent Contriver of the World.' But those times are past; and we of the nineteenth century, with our evolutionary theories and our mechanical philosophies, already know nature too impartially and too well to worship unreservedly any God of whose character she can be an adequate expression."[36]

In many ways this conclusion is at the very heart of James's entire philosophy in that the recognition of the failure of the argument from design prepared the ground for his assertions that purpose is human, subjective and arbitrary, that meaning is personal, and that facts are neutral.

It is the "neutrality" of facts that seems bound most intimately with the refusal to follow the traditional arguments to God. If *facts* merely are, are neither true nor false, good nor bad — and if their arrangement is better accounted for by the principles of Darwinism than by the conclusions of scholasticism — it followed for James that whatever purpose and value men find in the world is purpose and value that they have created there. This distinction was made rather early in his career; it was stated as an important limitation of the scope of the Principles of Psychology and detailed in the distinction between existential judgment and Werthurtheil in the Varieties.[37] In one of his most colorful passages James related the neutrality of fact to his conclusion that an analysis of nature cannot lead to a venerable object:

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[35] Cited by Perry in *The Thought and Character of William James*, Vol. I, p. 493. This was the later phase of the course (1893-1897).

[36] (1895), *The Will to Believe*, p. 43; *cf.* pp. 44, 52; *Pragmatism*, p. 70.

> "Visible nature is all plasticity and indifference, — a moral multiverse, as one might call it, and not a moral universe. To such a harlot we owe no allegiance; with her as a whole we can establish no moral communion .....If there be a divine Spirit of the universe, nature, such as we know her, cannot possibly be its ultimate word to man."[38]

Later in this volume James drew out through a picturesque illustration the corollary to this conclusion: purpose and value are humanly, not ontologically, grounded. Describing a universe, less gods, men, and starry heavens, composed only of one rock and two loving souls, he asserted that "that rock would have as thoroughly moral a constitution as any possible world which the eternities and immensities could harbor." True, ultimately the mortality of the inhabitants would bring the little universe to a tragic conclusion, but

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[37] William James, The Principles of Psychology (New York, 1890), Vol. I, p. vi; The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 4 (cf. supra, pp. 96 ff., n. 21). Cf. the lecture notes for Philosophy 4 cited by Perry in The Thought and Character of William James, Vol. II, p. 263.

[38] "Is Life Worth Living?" (1895), The Will to Believe, pp. 43-44.

> "while they lived, there would be real good things and real bad things in the universe; there would be obligations, claims, and expectations; obediences and refusals, and disappointments....there would, in short, be a moral life, whose active energy would have no limit but the intensity of interest in each other with which the hero and heroine might be endowed."[39]

This is a clear and straight-forward ethic, and James's implication surely was that a universe with gods, men and starry heavens is different from the rock-world only in degree, not in kind.[40] What he has done here — and it would seem to be a part of his repudiation of strict rationalism and his acceptance of Darwinism — is to remove the "ontological" ground from ethics and to place the responsibility for the status of good in the hands of man, albeit with the encouragement of a finite god. It is almost superfluous to add that this is an intimate part of his affirmation of the validity of the claims of the will.

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[39] "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" (1891), The Will to Believe, p. 197. This illustration offers some striking similarities to, and a tempting suggestion of influence on, certain strains of the secular existentialism of Jaspers and Heidegger.

[40] While this is probably quite strictly true, it does deserve mention of the qualification supplied by James in the conclusion of the essay. The moral philosopher does seek an ethical unity and stability which is best provided by the postulate of a divine thinker. But because the thought of that agent is hidden from man — and because, somehow, though divine he is finite — the outcome of the postulation of his existence is only an encouragement for man's moral energies. To this extent there is a difference when the gods and starry heavens are reintroduced into the rock-world; but it is a difference, however important, which only intensifies the existing situation but does not change it in kind. Cf. ibid., pp. 213 ff.

Another, and related, element in the movement toward James's voluntarism is contained in his analysis of the structure of conceptual knowledge. His view that, rather than "discovering" essences in the world, intellect "imposes" concepts on the raw data of experience is sufficiently well-known to deserve only the briefest review here. James's enthusiastic support of Bergson's cinematographical analysis of conceptual knowledge[41] is not entirely misleading although, as Kallen observes, it is more likely that Bergson confirmed James's view than that he instructed him in this course. James's friend and critic, Émile Boutroux, has condensed the pragmatic understanding of knowledge quite adequately: "Living experience is, itself, the original and direct contact of the mind with reality. Knowledge, correctly so-called, only comes after; it is the result of a work wrought by the mind on experience....."[42] Experience alone _is_; concepts and ideas _are made_ by man and apply, either truly or falsely, to that experience. A minor difference of emphasis in this matter exists between Bergson and James: where Bergson at times tended to deprecate conceptual knowledge, James, while admitting its inadequacies and excesses, gloried in the intellect as man's chief advantage over the animal world. For James,[43] this advantage consisted in the predictive value of concepts, and he observed that because "the environment kills as well as sustains us,....the tendency of raw experience to extinguish the experient himself is lessened in just the degree in which the elements in it that have a practical bearing upon life are analyzed out of the continuum and verbally fixed and coupled together, so that we may know what is in the wind for us and get ready to react in time."[44] The noetic act, then, is not "pure" activity, but is purposeful.

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[41] _Cf. supra_, pp. 94-96.

[42] Émile Boutroux, _William James_ (New York, 1912), p. 74. Boutroux adds, "following the suggestions of experience itself." Although in a sense this is true for James, when strictly pressed it would seem that he would give the qualification only a negative weight, _i. e._, that one's concepts will fall if they combat experience.

It is the discovery of the importance of purpose in the noetic act that encouraged the young James to break away from the traditional philosophy of pure and passive reason. In an early letter (to Thomas Davidson, 1/8/1882) he remarked "the ubiquitousness of emotional interests in the mind's operations."[45] Even earlier the discovery had been marked out suggestively in his "Remarks on Spencer's Definition of Mind as Correspondence" of which Perry has given this account:

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[43] And for Bergson too; but in Bergson there is an overtone of regret that predictability tends to quench the sources of vitality and spontaneity.

[44] "The Thing and Its Relations" (1905), *A Pluralistic Universe*, p. 350. Another purpose for (and *hence value of*) concepts is proposed by James. He seems to suggest that man has a strong desire to have the chaotic data of experience put in an orderly frame. This, of course, is an integral part of the ordering process by which man plots to anticipate further events. But James seems to suggest that orderliness has an independent, as well as a derivative, value. *E. g.*, in a passage describing the purpose of conceptualization, he first states its value for prediction and then adds "also that we may have a cleaner, clearer, more inclusive mental view." ("Humanism and Truth" (1904), William James, *The Meaning of Truth: A Sequel to "Pragmatism"* (New York, 1909), p. 63; *cf.* "Reflex Action and Theism" (1881), *The Will to Believe*, p. 125.) The only pragmatic recourse here would seem to be the assertion that a "clean and clear view" has a certain aesthetic value, and it is quite likely that this was James's intent. But, to be consistent, James must avoid any suggestion that cleanness and clearness are valuable in themselves.

> "This important essay develops the thesis that the central fact in mind is interest or preference. It is scarcely too much to say that this is the germinal idea of James's psychology, epistemology, and philosophy of religion....."[46]

That what man wants to know plays some part in what he does know appears in a dual role in James's attack against rationalism. Firstly, in accordance with his recognition of the predictive value of conceptualization, James observed that the range of things which a man knows (i. e., about which he conceptualizes) is determined by the type of things in which he is interested. This is, of course, the familiar comparison between the ideas of the artist and the botanist as they walk together through a country meadow. But it is a central distinction for James's instrumentalism: it marks his parting from Spencer,[47] and is an important precondition of the will to believe. As Bixler observes, in a sense man is given the power of creating his own environment by means of the direction of his attention; to be sure, there are certain facts forced on that attention, but within the limits permitted by physical and biological demands man is free to follow his own interests and thus does not inherit a world ready-made.[48] For a good number of years at least, the Pawnee just was not concerned about logarithmic functions and hence his conceptualizing activity was not purposively directed toward sorting out their complexities.

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[45] Cited in J. S. Bixler, op. cit., p. 125.

[46] Ralph Barton Perry, Annotated Bibliography of the Writings of William James (New York, 1920), pp. 7-8.

[47] Cf. a letter to Henry Holt (11/22/1878) cited in R. B. Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, Vol. II, p. 35. Cf. ibid., Vol. I, pp. 477-478.

James's corollary to this proceeds somewhat further: man not only conceptualizes about those things in which he has an interest, but he also tends to believe only those propositions which satisfy his own predilections. Now, this must be interpreted as broadly as it was by James: he did not mean that a man can will that free-falling bodies will accelerate at the rate of 26 feet/second/second. James's point is that, among the many propositions proposed for belief, man will tend to accept those which not only account satisfactorily for the external data in hand but also satisfy his internal and personal demands. This thesis will arise again in the discussion of the will to believe; our interest here is in James's application of it to rationalism's traditional proofs for the existence of God. This application forms one of the most vigorous parts of the Varieties:

> "Most of us pretend in some way to prop (our overbelief) upon our philosophy, but the philosophy itself is really propped upon this faith.....(The scholastic arguments for God's existence) prove nothing rigorous-

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[48] J. S. Bixler, op. cit., p. 88. Cf. "The Sentiment of Rationality" (1879), The Will to Believe, p. 70; "Reflex Action and Theism" (1881), ibid., p. 119. The resemblance between this thesis that what we know hinges on where we place our attention, and Ritschl's brief description of the "concomitant value-judgment" is striking.

> ly. They only corroborate our pre-existent partialities.....No! the book of Job went over this whole matter once for all and definitively. Ratiocination is a relatively superficial and unreal path to the deity.....We must therefore, I think, bid a definitive good-by to dogmatic theology."[49]

The theist is such, not because of the irresistible persuasiveness of the argument from design, but because he has a real, inner need to believe in the existence of a wise and benevolent creator whose reflection he then sees in the world about him. Having challenged the scientific force of the traditional arguments with his Darwinism, James completed the work with his psychological analysis of belief. The arguments may shore up a faith; it is impossible that they could create it.[50]

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[49] The Varieties of Religious Experience, pp. 518, 439, 448.

[50] There is a third aspect of James's theory of conceptual knowledge which is a part of his attack against rationalism. Agreeing with Bergson, James contended that not only is the real not equivalent to the rational but that the real is more than the rationality which is applied to it, i. e., experience overflows the concepts employed to contain it. His conclusion is clearly stated: "For my own part, I have finally found myself compelled to give up the logic, fairly, squarely, and irrevocably. It has an imperishable use in human life, but that use is not to make us theoretically acquainted with the essential nature of reality.....Reality, life, experience, concreteness, immediacy, use what word you will, exceeds our logic, overflows and surrounds it.....I prefer bluntly to call reality if not irrational at least non-rational in its constitution." (A Pluralistic Universe, pp. 212-213. Cf. ibid., passim, particularly Lecture VI.) In terms of religious knowledge, this overflow of reality over concepts was the reason why "the logical understanding, working in abstraction from such specifically religious experiences will always omit something and fail to reach completely adequate conclusions." (Ibid., p. 306.) It is through this line of thought that James was able to justify his interest in Bergson's intuitionism and, of course, echoed in his later works the distinction made in the Principles between knowledge about and knowledge by acquaintance. It is curious that in his discussion of the will to believe James did not press this distinction as much as one might expect, but our concern here is with its part in his attack on rationalism. As such, it is a derivative from his instrumentalist account of conceptual knowledge.

The fourth element in James's assertion of the collapse of religious rationalism was the most persuasive to its author, *viz.*, his moral objection to rationalism's god, the absolute.[51] (It is interesting that this element in James's personality should so completely reflect the second part of his constructive challenge to rationalism, *i. e.*, that belief requires the satisfaction of inner and personal interests.) James was willing to grant but one value to the Absolute: in reviewing Newman's statement of the scholastic formula for God's attributes, James observed that for some men this collection of nouns and adjectives, properly intoned, might have a certain aesthetic value.[52] Beyond this, however, the burden of his moral argument against the Absolute is that it is irrelevant to man's moral needs: "Mere existence commands no reverence whatever, or any other emotion, until its quality is specified. Neither does mere cosmic 'power,' unless it 'make for' something which can claim kinship from our sympathies..... As well might you speak of being irreverent to Space or disrespectful of the Equator."[53] In this he appears to have been in perfect harmony with Peirce who, in a letter reviewing Royce's World and the Individual, concluded that "the ideas are very beautiful. The logic is most execrable. I don't think it very good taste to stuff it so full of the name of God. The Absolute is strictly speaking, only God in a Pickwickian sense, that is, in a sense that has no effect."[54] Not only is the Absolute useless and irrelevant to man's moral aspirations, but attachment to it tends to vitiate even the human ground of those hopes and plans: "indifferentism is the true outcome of every view of the world which makes infinity and continuity to be its essence."[55] This is to say that at best the Absolute is amoral (and consequently, for James, not a proper religious object); at worst it is immoral, subverting rather than aiding man's moral impulse. Above all else, the religious object must be relevantly moral:

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[51] *Cf. supra*, p. 100, n. 27.

[52] *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 458. It is questionable if this concession can be pressed at all. Since James was unwilling to allow any relevance to the content of these nouns and adjectives, it would seem that a group of nonsense syllables, properly intoned, would be just as satisfying aesthetically. This would make his concession, not to the Absolute, but to the aesthetic value of intoned words.

[53] Cited in R. B. Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, Vol. I, p. 486. The statement is presumably from James's Philosophy 3: "The Philosophy of Evolution." James also saw very clearly that it was quite improper to identify the transcendent Absolute with the God of the Old Testament or of the New; *cf.* *A Pluralistic Universe*, p. 134.

> "'Deus est Ens, a se, extra et supra omne genus, necessarium, unum, infinite perfectum, simplex, immutabile, immensum, aeternum, intelligens,' etc., — wherein is such a definition really instructive? It means less than nothing in its pompous robe of adjectives. Pragmatism alone can read a positive meaning into it, and for that she turns her back upon the intellectualist point of view altogether. 'God's in his heaven; all's right with the world!' — That's the real heart of your theology, and for that you need

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[54] Cited in R. B. Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, Vol. II, p. 425.

[55] "On Some Hegelisms" (1882), The Will to Believe, p. 298n. This conclusion was reached in connection with the nitrous-oxide-gas-intoxication experiment. Although some would be inclined to say that this type of analysis ad clinicum is not very sporting, it does testify to James's openness and, since it could be reached through another route, does not seem entirely unjustified.

no rationalist definitions."[56]

But just how do we know that God, as a matter of fact, is in his heaven? James's answer is contained in his theory of the will to believe.

THE WILL TO BELIEVE

The will to believe is really a simple theory involving very few subtleties, although proceeding from a quite definite epistemological base. It is crucial in any understanding of the theory to appreciate its foundation in pragmatism, more particularly in the "broad pragmatism" which James proposed, often to the despair of his more conservative colleagues in the movement. There are three aspects of the argument of pragmatism which have a particular bearing here. One of these, viz., the central Jamesian thesis that all conceptualization is purposive, has been presented above as a part of his challenge to rationalism. One further word is required to establish this as a peculiarly Jamesian deviation from the main stream of the pragmatic-empiricist tradition, — a deviation which enabled him to achieve, but prevented some of his colleagues from reaching, the will to believe. In effect, by qualifying pragmatism with Bergsonism James was able to reach Renouvier's central conclusion.[57] The direction of this qualification is well summarized by Perry:

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[56] Pragmatism, pp. 121-122. Cf. "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results" (1898), Collected Essays and Reviews, p. 426.

[57] This, of course, is not meant to be historically accurate. James arrived at this qualification independently of Bergson, but it was in the young Frenchman that James found his greatest encouragement. Cf. supra, pp. 94-96.

> "While empiricism in the broad sense may be defined as the _a posteriori_ theory of existential knowledge, with James this theory is further qualified by his insistence that in arriving at such knowledge the knowing mind itself _initiates_ the ideas to which this _a posteriori_ test is applied.....As the doctrine is further unfolded it embraces two further tenets, namely, the _voluntaristic_ or fideistic theory of belief, and the _experiential_ or intuitive theory of reality."[58]

The second theme of pragmatism important for James's theory is the identification of the "true" and the "satisfactory." While this approach raised a host of problems which haunted the journals for more than a decade and which became particularly difficult when directed toward religious concepts, the concern here is with the development of the argument. Its foundation is located in the pragmatic notion of the place of concepts in experience: concepts are arbitrary constructs which are intended by their maker to stand in thought and communication for the objects of experience they are alleged to represent. As observed in the preceding section the cognizing human, functioning purposively, is able to manipulate these artificial substitutes into a predictive pattern which will enable him to deal more effectively with the future. For example, a man loading a truck is able to proceed through a series of substitutes-for-direct-experience to a prediction of the exact grade which his truck, loaded with a given number of objects in a given location, is able to mount without tipping. By combining the weight of the several objects in their location into a single vector of force (a substitute for the weighing experience[59]), and by manipulating this geometrically (that is, not directly in the loading experience) with the length (a substitute for the measuring experience) of the truck's axle, he is able to arrive at the degree of incline (another concept) on which the truck will be safe, but beyond which the machine will topple. Except for its origin in experience, this entire process, including its termination, has been conceptual and removed from the experience of truck-loading.

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[58] R. B. Perry, _The Thought and Character of William James_, Vol. I, p. 453. _Cf._ Vol. II, p. 76; "Reflex Action and Theism" (1881), _The Will to Believe_, pp. 117, 140-141.

But thus far nothing has been said of the "truth" of this line of reasoning. All that our mathematically inclined trucker has achieved is an hypothesis which may be either true or false; he might, alternatively, have asked a seer's advice or ventured a guess. Whatever the source of his final figure, in itself one hypothesis is as "good" as another, being neither true nor false thus far.[60] For James, the truth or falsity of the hypothesis is not bound up with its source, nor with the propriety of the reasoning process; the truth or falsity of the various hypotheses is achieved by a descent from the realm of the substitutes, back into the actual trucking experience. It is his contention that the vector of force hypothesis is true if it works, i. e., if the loaded truck does not tip over. James phrased the thesis in terms of the "leading character" of ideas: all ideas, having been drawn from experience, must lead back to experience if they are to have meaning; if they lead back to a satisfactory adjustment with that new experience, they are in so far forth true.[61] His most colorful illustration of the theory is contained in "The Tigers of India"[62] in which his conclusion is in effect that our idea of a tiger is true if, upon being shown a real tiger, we are able to recognize it as such, and to reject a jaguar if that were shown. This is to say, an idea gains truth if it has a satisfactory leading character in future experience. It is to insist, further, that truth is a wholly intra-experiential affair; it is not a relationship obtaining between a pure reality and personal appearances. It is to say that present ideas are neither true nor false in themselves, but are made such by future experience.

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[59] Actually this vector proceeding from the truck's center of gravity will be twice-removed from direct experience: the "weight" of each object is itself a substitute for the experience of perceiving a certain figure on the weighing scales; the vector of force from the center of gravity is an artificial combination of the several weights in their location and hence a second removal from the original experience.

[60] Although not very important in our illustration of the trucker's situation, James's insistence that the origin of an hypothesis is unrelated to its truth becomes crucial in the Varieties; cf. pp. 17-18 et passim. Cf. "The Will to Believe" (1896), The Will to Believe, p. 17: "It matters not to an empiricist from what quarter an hypothesis may come to him: he may have acquired it by fair means or by foul; passion may have whispered or accident suggested it; but if the total drift of thinking continues to confirm it, that is what he means by its being true."

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[61] This simple formula contained a host of difficulties which the pragmatists were eventually forced to face. James immediately saw a necessary qualification of the equation of the satisfactory and the true: "Of course, if you take the satisfactoriness concretely, as something felt by you now, and if, by truth, you mean truth taken abstractly and verified in the long run, you cannot make them equate, for it is notorious that the temporarily satisfactory is often false. Yet at each and every concrete moment, truth for each man is what that man 'troweth' at that moment with the maximum of satisfaction to himself; and similarly, abstract truth, truth verified by the long run, and abstract satisfactoriness, long run satisfactoriness, coincide. If, in short, we compare concrete with concrete and abstract with abstract, the true and the satisfactory do mean the same thing." ("Humanism and Truth" (1904), The Meaning of Truth, pp. 88-89.) This is to say that future experience may make the presently satisfactory quite unsatisfactory; thus, our trucker may find his formula satisfactory if driving at 40 mph, but quite unsatisfactory if driving at 15 mph. His problem is to reconstruct his old formula in a way that will put him into a satisfactory relationship with the new experience. In a sense, then, the true can become more true until, ideally at least, it reaches "the 'absolutely' true, meaning what no farther experience will ever alter, (which) is that ideal vanishing-point towards which we imagine that all our temporary truths will some day converge." (Pragmatism, p. 222.)

[62] (1895), The Meaning of Truth, pp. 43-50.

This leads to the third and corollary theme of the pragmatism underlying the will to believe: "The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process: the process namely of verifying itself, its-veri-fication. Its validity is the process of its valid-ation."[63] James frequently put this another way: truth is not so much the relationship obtaining eternally between a reality and the idea of it, as it is the relationship discovered to exist between two parts of entirely human experience. This is to take "the true" out of the realm of the eternal and the transcendent and to put it in the field of the human and the particular. Man does not so much "discover" truth as he "makes" it; by taking the vector of force hypothesis (a part of mental experience which merely is; is neither true nor false) and thrusting it into the loading and driving experience, our trucker engenders a truth upon the world.[64] It is in the conjunction of these two "neutral" experiences that truth or falsity is made. This was in effect a repudiation of the traditional school of eternal and pre-existent truths about which man becomes slowly informed. Its importance for James was the freedom it provided: if truth is a wholly human affair then man must be justified in setting out for truth in whatever direction his interests lead him.

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[63] Pragmatism, p. 201.

The theory of the will to believe is an expression of the freedom involved in knowing; it is also an expression of the limits of the empirical test. As Perry summarizes:

> "There are important fields in which the empirical test is remote or impossible, such as religion; and in these fields the moral test becomes peculiarly important. That even here fact-finding takes precedence of faith is clear from the importance which James attached to the empirical evidence for God and freedom. Thus James's fideism grows out of his empiricism. It is the sequel to the experimental method, and compensates for the limitations of empirically verifiable knowledge."[65]

By his willingness to proceed, through the will to believe, beyond the empirically verifiable James achieved that "broad pragmatism" which alarmed his more cautious colleagues. The difference may be expressed as follows: "narrow pragmatism" asserts that a man may hold for true that which is confirmed in his experience; James held that where empirical verification is lacking (temporarily or necessarily) a man is justified in believing that which his moral interests urge on him provided that at no point is it contradicted by experience.[66] Justice Holmes stated his friend's contention in a famous dissent: "Every year, if not every day, we have to wager our salvation upon some prophecy based upon imperfect knowledge."[67]

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[64] *Cf.* notes made by James after an interview with the *New York Times* (1907), cited in R. B. Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, Vol. II, p. 479.

[65] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 456. The second sentence is a highly important consideration which will be reviewed below.

James's original discussion of the theory opens with his now-familiar delineation of the types of options (decisions between hypotheses). Without further description these are, 1) living/dead; 2) forced/avoidable; 3) momentous/trivial. The only type of option in which James was interested, and to which the will to believe applies, was that "genuine" option which is living, forced, and momentous. That the option must be living and momentous is obvious enough; James went into some detail to establish his view of the "forced" character of certain options. It would seem that the object of the argument was to persuade his more conservatively empiricist friends that, the law of parsimony notwithstanding, there are occasions when one must spend more in the way of belief than he has taken in in facts.[68] There are options, he argued, in which "suspension of judgment" is itself a judgment. After some elaboration, he concluded that "there are, you see, inevitable occasions in life when inaction is a kind of action, and must count as action, and when not to be for is to be practically against [such is the vigor of James's pragmatism7; and in all such cases strict and consistent neutrality is an unattainable thing."[69] The religious question is such a "forced" option.

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[66] Cf. ibid., Vol. II, pp. 410-411.

[67] 250 U. S. 624; cited in Horace M. Kallen, "Remembering William James" In Commemoration of William James: 1842-1942, p. 22.

[68] Cf. R. B. Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, Vol. I, p. 151.

Another limitation to the scope of the will to believe has been stated above, _viz._, that one is free to believe without verification only where there is no present possibility of verification. James always contended, and this was not always appreciated by his critics, that where evidence is present, belief may not fly against the face of the facts.[70] Thus a good part of his work in the field of religion was an effort to clarify which areas contain factual evidence and which are open to belief beyond verification. The preface to his discussion of immortality discloses an illustration of this plan of attack: "But my concern in the lecture was not to discuss immortality in general. It was confined to showing it to be _not incompatible_ with the brain-function theory of our present mundane consciousness."[71] Thus, where the belief is not inconsistent with the facts, where the evidence is insufficient to supply any type of verification, where the option is forced, living, and momentous — where all these conditions prevail and where the believing man has a moral stake in the outcome, he has a right to place his wager of belief where he will.[72]

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[69] "Is Life Worth Living?" (1895), _The Will to Believe_, p. 55.

[70] "The Will to Believe" (1896), _ibid._, p. 29.

[71] _Human Immortality: Two Supposed Objections to the Doctrine_, p. viii.

[72] Although the "will to believe" cannot be identified with "Pascal's Wager" because of the contrasting metaphysics, cosmologies, and epistemologies underlying the two proposals, there are striking resemblances which James freely acknowledged.

Although different statements of the will to believe run throughout James's works, its clearest expression is found in the "faith-ladder":

> "1. There is nothing absurd in a certain view of the world being true, nothing self-contradictory;
> 2. It *might* have been true under certain conditions;
> 3. It *may be* true, even now;
> 4. It *is fit* to be true;
> 5. It *ought* to be true;
> 6. It *must* be true;
> 7. It *shall* be true, at any rate true for *me*."[73]

Now, there is nothing difficult in the first three steps; James could probably compel the most rigorous positivist to agree to them, albeit grudgingly. The fourth and fifth steps could surely be mounted by the most cautious, provided he shared James's moral world-view and cared to indulge his ethical imagination. But the sixth step of the ladder, his opponents argued, does not exist, or if it does there is no way to mount it. If the metaphor may be stretched even further, — it was contended that what James actually had were two ladders, one metaphysical and the other moral, and while it may be legitimate to step from the former to the latter (3 to 4), it was impossible to return.[74] Summits conquered by moral steps, as it were, are moral summits and not metaphysical.

A brief digression is required to trace down one part of James's conclusion. To one statement of the faith-ladder he appended "and your acting thus (holding "x" for true) may in certain special cases be a means of making it securely true in the end."[75] Train robbers can be apprehended only if each passenger believes that his neighbor will rise in attack with him. This theme of the facts created by belief can be found throughout James's writings and is well stated in the *Principles*.[76] His case can hardly be attacked directly, but there were some who qualified it with the argument that in a sinking rowboat it is the act of bailing that saves the occupants, not their belief in the efficacy of bailing. But it would seem impossible to attack directly the thesis that bailing is undertaken only where it is believed to do some good. This is an important side issue and one which occupied a good amount of James's interest. But if the will to believe contains anything more than the transparently obvious, as it surely does, its conclusion must apply beyond the belief-created fact. It must apply to those facts which we cannot reach, or have not yet reached, by the theoretic reason.

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[73] *Some Problems of Philosophy*, p. 224. In a slightly modified form the "faith-ladder" is also found in *A Pluralistic Universe*, p. 329.

[74] Or, strictly, any return would not improve his position on the metaphysical ladder.

"Our passional nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds."[77] Because the uses to which the will to believe has been put are a matter of considerable dispute, it may be instructive to add to James's summary statement Perry's brief definition: "The voluntaristic theory of belief is the theory that believing is an act of will, which exceeds the limits of experimental verification, and must, in so far as this is the case, proceed on moral grounds."[78] Before proceeding to a more detailed analysis of what this theory involves, it is necessary to clear up, — or at least locate the difficulty in, — one further matter.

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[75] *Ibid.*

[76] *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. II, pp. 321-322. *Cf.* "The Will to Believe" (1896), *The Will to Believe*, p. 25; "The Sentiment of Rationality" (1880), *ibid.*, p. 96.

[77] "The Will to Believe" (1896), *ibid.*, p. 11.

The bulk of the attacks directed at the will to believe is clarified by the single question: Does it give knowledge? The answer to this is by no means clear. At times James almost seems to give a simple affirmative; more often it is qualified; when pressed, the answer may well be a negative. Friends of the theory have supplied answers in accord with their private inclinations; critics have tended to treat the question as answered affirmatively. The difficulty arises because there is ground in James's writings for each of the several interpretations. The problem also arises in other terms: Is the purpose of the will to believe theme to establish merely "what we are justified in believing" or is it an effort to locate an approach to knowledge beyond the limitations of empirical verification? Again, James supplies ground for an affirmative answer to either question. But, granting for the moment that James intended only the first, would there not seem to be an intimate relationship between "what we are justified in believing" and a true item of knowledge?[79] For in a sense, of course, all that "empirical verification" succeeds in doing is to establish "what we are justified in believing."[80] There is a line to be drawn here and the precise point at which James would have us draw it is not clear.

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[78] R. B. Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, Vol. I, p. 454.

For example, in an important letter to H. M. Kallen James wrote: "Truth is constituted by verification actual or possible, and beliefs, *however* reached, have to be verified before they can count as true. The question whether we have a right to believe anything before verification concerns not the constitution of truth, but the policy of belief."[81] Now, the first sentence is surely that of a man committed for his knowledge to the method of empirical verification; superficially at least, the second sentence hardly contradicts that, but merely expresses a somewhat liberalized attitude toward the worth, but not the truth, of unverified propositions. On the other hand, James's answers (italicized) to James B. Pratt's Questionnaire do seem to contradict the theme of his letter:

> "3. Why do you believe in God? Is it
> (1) From some argument? *Emphatically, no.*
> Or (2) Because you have experienced His presence?
> *No, but rather because I need it so that it 'must' be true.*"[82]

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[79] Certainly "knowledge for me," and although not transcendentally or objectively true, surely "true for me in so far forth" etc.

[80] Albeit, its public character gives it a certain advantage over the more private "will to believe."

[81] (8/1/1907), cited in *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 249.

[82] (1904), *The Letters of William James*, Vol. II, p. 213.

This connection between need and truth was expressed invertedly in the Principles: "'Nothing which I can feel like that can be false.' All our religious and supernatural beliefs are of this order. The surest warrant for immortality is the yearning of our bowels for our dear ones; for God, the sinking sense it gives us to imagine no such Providence or help."[83] It would seem here that James has asserted more than that he is "justified" in holding these beliefs; it would seem that he is saying that they are "true" (albeit temporarily and "for him"). It would also seem that the term "knowledge" (again temporary and personal) can be applied descriptively to them. Yet this is hardly the sense of the letter to Dr. Kallen.[84]

It is not difficult to imagine the confusion which this apparent inconsistency has introduced into the secondary literature on James. Dr. Perry, as usual, has been more cautious than most[85] in summarizing the relationship here:

> "....James admits that in certain cases the will may be the sole arbiter of knowledge. Ideas may be ac-

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[83] The Principles of Psychology, Vol. II, p. 308.

[84] Statements echoing the sense of those sent to Dr. Kallen can be found in Chapter LXIV of R. B. Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, Vol. II.

[85] J. S. Bixler, for example, has not been at all cautious: "Truth is a relation in which the element of value is important. Its authority, like that of values themselves, rests on its pertinence to human situations. In fact, truth may almost be called a corollary of value. If a belief or idea is valuable it is true 'so far forth.' Truth has to do with the 'relevant,' the 'meaningful,' the 'important.' James's whole philosophy may indeed be described as centering in the notion of the humanly significant." (J. S. Bixler, op. cit., p. 104). Now, this has probably gone further than James would sanction; yet Bixler could make a good case that this is a fair summary of the implications of the will to believe as expressed in some of James's writings.

> credited not only by empirical, but by moral evidence. That this doctrine is a supplement and not a corollary to empiricism, I do not deny. But I should like to point out that this supplement is the complement — consistent with empiricism, and prescribed by it."[86]

The working out of this obscurity illuminates certain questions raised by the theory as a whole; these questions may be phrased in the terms of Dr. Perry's conclusion: Can the theory of the will to believe really be a satisfactory religious and ethical supplement to James's empiricism, and, is it really a complement to the empirical method or actually only a corollary?

SOME QUESTIONS RAISED

The attacks levelled against James's theory of the will to believe were about what one would expect: for some it had gone too far, for others not far enough. However, there was an unusual amount of misunderstanding over terms and the intent of the theory, no small part of which appears to have been James's fault. But there were some who seem to have made a particular effort to avoid a sympathetic understanding of the theory, and the tensions created were not removed by the time of James's death.

The precise history and development of the controversies, particularly the important one with Dickinson S. Miller, may be traced down in the journals. Chapter LXIV, "A Chapter of Criticisms," of Perry's definitive study of James contains a helpful and concise summary. Briefly, James was accused of subjectivism and solipsism, skepticism, "wishful-thinking," and confusion. The charge of subjectivism, launched by many including Royce and Bradley, was directed primarily at pragmatism, but would surely include the conclusions of the will to believe theme. Pragmatism, they argued, in centering its attention on the "workable," is unable to get at the "real." In a way, James welcomed this attack as another opportunity to make clear the exact purpose and limits of his pragmatic method. His scheme of reply is clear enough: pragmatism is not a metaphysic; it is simply an epistemology; it is the critics who are insisting that it be, or must presuppose, a metaphysic. "One of pragmatism's merits is that it is so purely epistemological. It must assume realities; but it prejudges nothing as to their constitutions, and the most diverse metaphysics can use it as their foundation. It certainly has no special affinity with solipsism."[87] This reply is echoed in another passage which also chides the critics for their oversights and the firm assurance with which they announced their alternatives:

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[86] R. B. Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, Vol. I, p. 455.

> "I myself have never thought of humanism as being subjectivistic further than to this extent, that, inasmuch as it treats the thinker as being himself one portion of reality, it must also allow that some of the realities that he declares for true are created by his being there. Such realities of course are either acts of his, or relations between other things and him, or relations between things which, but for him, would never have been traced. Humanists are subjectivistic, also in this, that, unlike rationalists (who think they carry a warrant for the absolute truth of what they now believe in in their present pocket), they hold all present beliefs as subject to revision in the light of

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[87] "The Pragmatist Account of Truth and Its Misunderstanders" (1908), The Meaning of Truth, p. 215.

> future experience. The future experience, however, may be of things outside the thinker; and that this is so the humanist may believe as freely as any other kind of empiricist philosopher."[88]

James is here agreeing that pragmatism does not guarantee the objective structure of an external world, but neither is it compatible only with solipsism; it is "purely epistemological" and might well be adopted by any number of schools. Now, it is a tidy, little question whether every epistemology presupposes, or is bound to, a particular metaphysic. Does a metaphysic presuppose an epistemology, or does an epistemology imply a metaphysic, and just where does one step into the water, are questions which are even more unsettling now than in James's day. Whatever one's personal solution, James's answer is clear enough: one may begin with an epistemology without having asked a metaphysical question.[89] It was because he felt this so keenly that he resented what he considered metaphysical attacks against an epistemological theory.

Regardless of the unanswered problems involved in this approach, it did enable James to avoid Feuerbach's fatal conclusions. Religious hopes and objects are useful and stimulating to man and they are "in so far forth" true. It was James's contention that thus far he had not been metaphysical, but merely epistemological. He who says that, though useful, these religious objects are not "really" existent has not reached his conclusion through epistemology, but has created an ontological superstructure which is not the only one which could be erected on such a base.

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[88] "Humanism and Truth Once More" (1905), William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (New York, 1912), p. 251. This particular theme, in which James apparently felt that his entire method was being misunderstood, culminated in a particularly vigorous reply to J. B. Pratt's *What Is Pragmatism?* Noting Pratt's refusal to take "true" relatively, James continued: "'But is the object *really* true or not?' — the critic then seems to ask, — as if the pragmatist were bound to throw in a whole ontology on top of his epistemology and tell us what realities indubitably exist. 'One world at a time,' would seem to be the right reply here." "Professor Pratt on Truth" (1907), *The Meaning of Truth*, pp. 176-177.

[89] *Cf. supra*, p. 129, n. 88.

The structure of the charge of skepticism is not unlike the objection cited above, although it proceeds from a different quarter. J. S. Moore, following Pratt, has concluded as follows:

> "Logically, however, as Professor Pratt points out, pragmatism is after all absolutely incompatible with the religious view of the world. It can merely assert that the idea of God is true so far as it is useful, that it is better for us to act as if God exists; but His actual existence is not involved in that determination. Thus the logical outcome of pragmatism when applied to religion is necessarily skepticism."[90]

Now, Moore is not at all justified in this analysis; it was just such demands as his concerning God's "actual existence" that caused James to cry out, "One world at a time."[91] Moore has required a metaphysical answer from an epistemological theory. James would deny Moore's first sentence,[92] agree to the second without considering it derogatory, and insist that the third is false. James would have argued that what Moore was really charging was "ontological skepticism" and that this, even as modified, is unjust and should read "agnosticism." Pragmatism, as an epistemological theory bound to experience, cannot answer metaphysical questions directed at the structures behind experience.

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[90] Jared S. Moore, "The Religious Significance of the Philosophy of William James" Sewanee Review, January, 1913, p. 14.

[91] *Cf. supra*, p. 129, n. 88.

[92] *Cf. Pragmatism*, *passim*.

The better directed objection to James's theory is the obvious one, viz., that the will to believe is an advocacy of wishful-thinking. Although this is the problem of the two ladders cited above,[93] E. E. Sabin's concise summary should be interpolated here:

> "The course which James took was to say that, because a man's life is made more humanly worthy by a faith in immortality, the belief, in so far forth, is true. He had a right to say that a belief in so far as it leads to desirable conduct is morally useful and eminently practical, because it serves social ends. This is so tautological as to be incontestable. But to say that it is in so far forth true as well, is to make truth meaningless in contradistinction to goodness and utility.....James saw....clearly that the very doubtfulness of the issue (will good triumph?) spurs the strenuous man to his best achievement, and that to be out of the conflict, and to take no share in the danger, is to be truly ignoble. But James lost this insight when he made obscure the distinction between the good and the true."[94]

It may be that the heart of Sabin's criticism, the distinction between the good and the true, does not fully reflect James's view of their inter-relatedness. However, many found that James had failed to show why at least particular goods are true (i.e., how he returned from the one ladder to the other).

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[93] Cf. supra, p. 122.

[94] Ethel Ernestine Sabin, William James and Pragmatism (Lancaster, Pa., 1916), pp. 20, 26.

Now, there is an answer to this, although it meets the charge obliquely. If the major theme of the Varieties be taken as suggestive, it would seem that James's reply is that of course there is no theoretic ground for equating the good and the true; there is really very little final evidence for the problem at all. But, with the lack of empirical data, the manner in which each man decides for or against a particular good, or whether he remains undecided — this decision will make all the difference in his behavior and the way he is formed by his further experience. To be sure, this is to be quite circular and to defend the theory of the will to believe by its own thesis, thus requiring a trans-logical leap to enter the circle. But James never contended that his argument was compulsive; he always permitted his reader to refuse to leap, so long as that reader allowed that his refusal was itself a decision. However, Sabin is perhaps correct in pointing out that the will to believe plays a central role in the definition of the "true." As will be shown below, it is quite likely that James ends with two different "truths" and that their relationship may not be entirely satisfactory.

Finally, there is the observation, expressed by Dewey here, that the controversy stems from a misunderstanding of the theory, that the will to believe is not so much a supplement to the empirical method as it is an insistence that it remain relevant to the human situation:

> "Now I submit that a careful reading will show beyond doubt that what James was actually concerned with was

> not the truth of scientific propositions but the significance, that is, the weight, the momentousness, the *raison d'être*, of philosophic systems and principles. He undeniably made statements that do not harmonize with this remark. There are passages in which he takes Peirce's statement of the way of arriving at the meaning of scientific conceptions as if it were intended to be a way of determining their truth.....If we free what James said from these confusions and interpret what he said in the light of his vital concern that philosophy have vital significance for human living, instead of being scholastic and academic, we shall, I think, be able to grasp the lesson he wanted to enforce."[95]

Although Dewey has the letter to Kallen on his side in this interpretation, it would seem difficult to read James's concern over the "justification of belief" and the statement of the "faith-ladder" as merely an insistence that philosophy be vital. This would make James too much like Dewey. The suggestion does have the value of correcting the view, on the other side, that James had developed a theory of knowledge which could be used against science. It testifies further to the lack of clarity in James's expression of his precise intention.

In addition to this brief summary of some of the objections launched against the will to believe there are a few questions which may be asked of the theory as a whole. The approach of these questions is directed to James's conclusions rather than to the method by which they were reached; thus, the questions really ask, "granting the conclusions of the theory of the will to believe, what do we now have?" or, more pointedly, "do we have what James said we have?"[96] The first step must be to locate just what conclusions we are meant to grant, i. e., just what James intended the will to believe to accomplish.

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[95] John Dewey, "William James as Empiricist" *In Commemoration of William James: 1842-1942*, p. 55.

[96] This writer must confess that he finds the route to the will to believe wholly persuasive. Whatever quarrel he has is

In the final pages of the last section,[97] we observed the difficulty experienced in finding the purpose of the will to believe: is it (1) merely a justification of belief, or (2) a new route to true knowledge? If it is the first, is it not also something of the second? Briefly, the reading and rereading of James's works and the secondary material on his life and thought have convinced this writer that the best interpretation of his purpose is that the will to believe was intended as a liberalization of the increasing orthodoxy of the empirical and pragmatic methods. He was concerned lest his colleagues limit the "real" to the verifiable, and thus become as humanly irrelevant as the Hegelians. In his own experience the real extended far beyond the verifiable.[98] In large part man must live beyond the verifiable, and any philosophy which fails, or is unable, to treat this area beyond is in so far irrelevant.

But, the method which James "broadened" with the will to believe was a method of gaining knowledge, and hence any broad-

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not with the route but with James's description of his place of arrival.

[97] Cf. supra, pp. 124-127.

[98] This, of course, is a play on words: "real" being taken in two senses. Yet it does point up James's concern and his problem. The empiricists agreed that the real was as wide as the experienced, yet their method tended to limit their interest to the verifiable and thus blocked out whole areas of behavior. But, in redirecting their attention to these areas, James was forced to consider the truth-status of unverified beliefs, and it was the result of this consideration, the will to believe, that brought dissent.

ening must be related, in terms of knowledge, to that which it broadens. Thus the question, "do I know my beliefs?" For James, beliefs are known in the sense that they are held important enough to determine conduct, yet he did recognize that they are not known in the presently, publicly verifiable sense that, *e. g.*, the population of Albany is known. This is to say that beliefs are distinguished from casual opinion by their transcendent importance. Granting this, the question becomes "in what sense can beliefs be termed 'true' or 'false'?"

As we understand James's writings and their implications, he gives two, not necessarily incompatible, answers. On the one hand, as in the letter to Kallen, beliefs are neither true nor false but only that to which we hold in view of the lack of evidence. On this view, the function of the theory of the will to believe is merely to maintain that the right to believe is not abridged by the limits of the data. But, that to which we hold must have some relation to the true. In the first view, this relation is one of potentiality; *i. e.*, beliefs are hypotheses which, being acted on, *become* either true or false. Now, while James appreciated the logical consistency of this view,[99] he realized that it was not quite an accurate description of the believing situation. Hence his second, and again not necessarily incompatible, view that where the moral impulse to a specific belief is sufficiently strong that belief is true, at least for the believer. This is merely the recognition that in the human situation beliefs are never held merely as hypotheses, but are held as true, albeit subject to revision. Because moral man must act at this moment, his belief that this is a moral universe is no mere hypothesis but a strategy and rule of behavior accepted now by him as true. But in thus ridding his first view of its sterility, it would seem that James involved himself in a double use of the term "true".

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[99] Particularly its consistency with his contention throughout the *Varieties* that the source of an hypothesis is unrelated to its truth.

Continuing this interpretation, it is important to understand the reconstruction in terms required if James is to apply "true" to both of the following propositions:

(1) "There are twelve books on the shelf."
(2) "This is a moral universe."

The truth of (1) derives from its public verifiability; the truth of (2) from its being held vigorously and being determinative for conduct. (It would be misleading to compare these to the distinction made in James's early works between "knowledge about" and "knowledge by acquaintance," although there surely is some resemblance.) To be sure, James did distinguish between the truth of these propositions: the one might be called "public truth"; the other "private," or "truth for me." The important point, and the point which prompted the dissent, is that he was willing to call the latter "true," and not merely "wished" or "hoped for."

This understanding of the will to believe contains one further element which draws the seemingly radical argument back into a more conservative framework. If this is a satisfactory interpretation of James, the crucial problem is the relation of "truth for me" to "publicly verifiable truth." In all of his statements of the will to believe James insisted that the right to belief exists only where there is no present data opposing that belief; a second and corollary condition was that the belief must be held tentatively. Belief must always be held so as to be capable of reconstruction in terms of future experience. With this, James drew back toward the identification of "belief" and "hypothesis." Yet, the two were never quite equated: an hypothesis may be set out with some vigor, but without verification it can in no sense be called "true." While he held that belief, on the other hand, must be held capable of reconstruction, James recognized that the moral impulses urging its acceptance were such that for the believer that belief was "true."

This interpretation of the will to believe may be summarized as follows: Where there is no evidence to support a decision on a live, forced, and momentous option, a man has a right to choose that alternative which he finds morally satisfying. In so doing, that man has proclaimed his choice as true for him; because of its momentous character it is no mere opinion. Although, in this sense, the choice or belief may be termed "true," it must be held in a way that will permit reconstruction, if necessary, in the light of future experience. Thus, while a "true" belief does not possess the "public truth" of a verified hypothesis,[100] because its believer acts with it as a strategy it may be termed "true for him."[101] Although this interpretation creates serious problems of its own, it does have the advantage of avoiding the translation of the entire theory into merely an appeal for vitality in philosophy.[102] Secondly, it gives a substance to the theory which would be lacking if the letter to Kallen were taken as the sole key to interpretation. Finally, by emphasizing the tentativeness of belief it avoids an interpretation that would allow belief to be opposed to empirically verified hypothesis. It remains to ask whether this middle course is really a satisfactory solution to the problem of religious knowledge.

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[100] Of course, even a "verified hypothesis" must be held so as to be capable of reconstruction in the light of future experience. Cf. supra, the reconstruction required in the trucker's "verified" formula in order to account for the facts of momentum. Yet the reader must not be misled into

The criticism we have to make of the will to believe, as here interpreted, is quite simple: the theory fails to provide a description adequate to religious experience. Although the theory may be consistent enough if one grants the redefinition of "truth," the scope which it permits to religious knowledge is quite artificial and unrelated to the actual religious situ-

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thinking that the tentativeness with which both beliefs and "verified hypotheses" must be held implies that they have an equal-truth status because both are tentative. The distinction must be maintained: the one is supported by empirical data which can be checked; the other, although urged by moral impulses, lacks an empirical grounding.

[101] It is always quite difficult to document an "interpretation." The interpretation presented on the preceding pages is an attempt to work out the function and status which James intended to assign to the will to believe. As such, it draws from the letter to Kallen, the various statements of the faith-ladder, "The Will to Believe" (1896), the Varieties, and "Faith and the Right to Believe" (an appendix to Some Problems of Philosophy). A further, less particularized source is the biographical portrait drawn by R. B. Perry.

[102] *Cf.* Dewey's analysis, *supra*, pp. 132-133.

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In the first place, the "truth" which beliefs may have for James is quite hollow. It is an interesting question whether one philosophy may embrace two different types of truth. There is, perhaps, some justification for the type of bifurcation presented by Bergson, i. e., between conceptual truth and intuitive truth. But whatever stability such a division might have arises from the fact that the two truths are of a different order. In James the situation is quite different. Because of the manner in which he arranged the relationship between the two truths (that is, "true" beliefs must be held so as to be capable of reconstruction in terms of whatever new truths appear in the sphere of the empirically verifiable) — because of this relationship, — it would seem that whatever truth a belief might have is a prospective truth only. If empirical verifiability is the ultimate standard of truth (the final means by which truth "comes about"), would it not appear that whatever truths a man might have are such because of their (potential) empirical verification? Again, this would be so only if the two truths were of the same order. In James's philosophy they are; the theory of the will to believe is an attempt to know beyond the temporary (or permanent) limits of empirical verification. But although beyond those limits, the assertions of belief are of the same order as those gained by the more limited route. That is, James's "beliefs" are not of the order of "this sunset is beautiful," but rather include such propositions as "there is an all-encompassing World-Mind which is concerned with our individual destinies." To borrow Ritschl's terminology, the will to believe is an effort to increase our store of "theoretic knowledge." To put the case a third way, James's beliefs are concerned with "the actual state of things," they are not directed at "meanings" or "values."

If it is the case that beliefs are of the same order as hypotheses, and if they must be held, albeit with vigor, as hypotheses capable of reconstruction in terms of future experience, then the only useful assertion of their *truth* would be *after* verification. This is to say, with some regret, that only the letter to Professor Kallen is sound and that the sense in which "true" is used in the final step of the faith-ladder is quite misleading. Because I feel that a certain view of the world ought to be true, I may make that view determinative for my conduct and I may hold to it with vigorous hope; but so long as the ultimate test of that belief's truth is its verifiability, the sense in which its determinativeness gives it "truth" is quite shallow. Thus, while the theory of the will to believe may justify believing, *i. e.*, may justify holding to a belief when evidence is lacking, so long as beliefs are of the order of hypotheses about the true state of affairs they must be treated as neither true nor false, simply unverified, although cherished. To say that because they are "cherished" they are in so far forth "true" is to make the concept of truth unmanageable, so long as the ultimate check on truth is empirical verification. As James described them, beliefs can only be *justifiably cherished hypotheses*.

James's ceaseless search for empirical confirmation of religious belief testifies to the shallowness of the "truth" of those beliefs before verification. With his amazing openness to all forms of evidence, James turned to psychic research and mind-cure in the hope of establishing an empirical ground for his over-beliefs. Convinced that he was justified in holding the beliefs, because of the manner in which he understood the structure of belief he was compelled to seek their truth elsewhere, in empirical verification. James thus achieved an epistemological harmony between religious and scientific knowledge, but it was a harmony that subordinated, in every important respect but origin, the truth of the former to that of the latter.[103] When pressed, the theory of the will to believe permits only a broad, "open-minded," empirical theology.[104]

Now, this writer has very little quarrel with empirical theology. Indeed, if religious belief is what James took it to be, the empirical theology of the will to believe, — with the qualifications described above, —would seem to embody an excellent analysis. But it is our conviction that the will to believe includes only a relatively insignificant part of what is generally termed "religious knowledge." It treats unsubstantiated beliefs about the existing order of things. This was argued above: beliefs are best described as justifiably cherished hypotheses dependent for their truth on future empirical verification. They are of the same order — although cherished — as "the sun will rise at 5:38." They form, again in Ritschl's terminology, potential "theoretic knowledge." It is the contention of this chapter that while the theory of the will to believe may contain a highly cogent account of religious belief, it is unable to deal with the more important area of religious faith.

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[103] Cf. R. B. Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, Vol. I, p. 451.

[104] "Broad" or "open-minded" in the sense that belief is not limited to the verified (although truth is), but may include the cherished.

If religious beliefs are specific statements describing a cherished order of things, religious faith is a general "attitude" toward the world by virtue of which those beliefs are cherished. Repeatedly, James justified belief by the absence of empirical data and the presence of "moral impulses;" yet he never questioned those impulses, although they formed the only positive strength of the beliefs. He came, perhaps, closest to examining them in his distinction between the "healthy-minded" and the "morbid-minded" in the Varieties. The really important difference between these two, as James pointed out, is not that they have different experiences but that the ways in which each experience is translated in terms of meaning differ so radically. To put our criticism in the terms of James's analysis of these religious types: the seat of the religion of healthy-mindedness is not so much specific healthy-minded "beliefs" as it is the general attitude or faith that this is a happy world. That the truly enduring element in healthy-mindedness is the general attitude of optimism is illustrated in the behavior of the man who, finding a specific optimistic belief destined to frustration, turns on the strength of his general faith-attitude to a reinterpretation of the situation which will square with the facts and yet also satisfy his optimistic "moral impulses." Although "the facts" may present a channel outside of which religious beliefs are not viable, the precise alternatives which are chosen within that channel derive from a general organization of meaning or value which is relatively untouched by verification.

In sum, this is to say that the central truths of religion are of a different order from those of theoretic knowledge (verified hypotheses and cherished hypotheses). Even in the manner James described it, the believing situation contains elements which are not verifiable.[105] "On pragmatistic principles, if the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word, it is true."[106] This statement, taken in conjunction with the statement of the will to believe, would seem to require that a religious belief be "satisfactory" in two respects: it must be supported, or at least not contradicted, by whatever empirical data is in hand; and it must satisfy the moral impulses of the believer. While an empirical theology may contain a fine analysis of these beliefs, it utterly fails to consider the structure of the "impulses" or attitudes which bulk so large in their acceptance. Because this attitude is the controlling element in religion, an empirical theology can be only a first step in an understanding of the structure of religious faith.

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[105] James seems to see this in his "M + x" formula ("The Sentiment of Rationality" (1880), The Will to Believe, pp. 101 ff.) which describes man's understanding of the world as composed of the "mundane facts" (M) and his attitude toward them (x). But even here his tendency is to treat "x" as an hypothesis about the actual organization of facts rather than an attitude toward them. Again, this makes "x" of the order of belief, not of faith.

[106] Pragmatism, p. 299.

But this is not quite accurate. There is a strain in James's writings which suggests another sense in which a belief should be satisfactory, viz., that every belief must contribute to the believer's successful adjustment to his environment. This strain, clearly derived from James's foundation in pragmatism and Darwinism, may not contradict the theme of the will to believe, but neither is it directly implied by the theory. Its most famous statement is found in "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life":

> "The capacity of the strenuous mood lies so deep down among our natural human possibilities that even if there were no metaphysical or traditional grounds for believing in a God, men would postulate one simply as a pretext for living hard, and getting out of the game of existence its keenest possibilities of zest."[107]

In this statement which, again, must not be taken as an integral part of the will to believe, James has become involved in a strict anthropocentrism. In effect, he has shifted the relation of belief and value from a focus in the particular and individual "moral impulses" to the over-arching value of adaptation. He has stepped outside the intimate, personal organization of value which dictates the direction of belief to an inclusive scheme capable of treating those values generally. Although it is possible that these may be compatible, emphasis on the "adaptation" theme forces a not necessarily self-cented theory of belief into an anthropocentric framework. But if it does this, it also does that which the theory of the will to believe fails to do, namely, treats the values which prompt belief. The intimate, but unexamined, values foundational to the will to believe are thus subsumed in a socio-psychological theory of adaptation.

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[107] (1891), The Will to Believe, p. 213.

This writer is not wholly convinced that this was James's intention. The vigor of his personality and much of his writting often suggests that for James values just "were there," they were not derived, but rather had a giveness that was sufficient explanation. If the theory of the will to believe can be cut off from this adaptationist base it gains a freedom from anthropocentrism but loses its ground in a value-theory. For James, of course, it was grounded in that particular set of values which formed its author but were otherwise quite arbitrary. He was also able to see those values as contributing to a happy adjustment; but it is an open question for this writer whether for James the worth of those values derived from their contribution to adaptation. To answer affirmatively is to point James's entire religious epistemology toward a theology of the adjusted self; to suggest a negative is to prepare a path by which the will to believe might be founded on an alternative value-theory which would direct both faith and belief into an area wider than the self. One's reply also answers the question: "In terms of what is a god satisfactory?"

In summary, these various excursions in and around William

James's theory of belief have located a number of problems. Firstly, there is a basic confusion over the purpose of the theory: is it merely a justification of belief or is it an assertion that somehow unverified beliefs may be true? The suggested interpretation results in a two-fold definition of truth which, while perhaps theoretically quite consistent, results in a very shallow notion of the truth of beliefs. More importantly, it was observed that the will to believe requires a value-theory which James had failed to make explicit. While an ethic of adaptation would fill this lack, it must lead invariably to an enthropocentrism which severely curtails the scope of faith. The real question, then, about the will to believe concerns the nature of the faith which both prompts and undergirds it. In analyzing the relationship between belief and fact, James failed to consider adequately the structure of the prior faith-attitude which caused that belief to be proposed. An instructive examination of such a faith-attitude, but one which may lack the advantages of James's treatment of belief and fact, can be found in the theology of commitment of H. Richard Niebuhr.

CHAPTER IV

H. RICHARD NIEBUHR:

THE CONFESSIONAL STRUCTURE OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

The problem of God "does not arise for us in the speculative form of such questions as, 'Does God exist?' or, 'What is the first cause, what the ultimate substance?' Our first question is How is faith in God possible? In other words the problem of God arises for us in its subjective or personal rather than in its objective or impersonal form."[1] In such Kantian fashion H. Richard Niebuhr has set his problem and marked out the tentative lines of the route to be followed. With what intelligible framework can the objective fact of subjective faith be reconciled?

It has been the source of some interest that an impressive study of what is really epistemology should come from the pen of one who describes himself as essentially a social thinker.[2] Yet, it is this very approach which, although superficially a digression, supplies the key to an understanding of the epistemology and, through that, back to the social theory. Christ and Culture must be read in the light of The Meaning of Revelation, but conversely, the epistemological study gains relevance only through the later volume. The reconstruction in the relations between church and society is necessitated by a revised estimate of the structure and function of religious knowledge: the legitimate role of theology is confession, not apology.

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[1] H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Nature and Existence of God," Motive, December 1943, p. 14.

[2] His Social Sources of Denominationalism and The Kingdom of God in America remain basic works in the field; more recently, Christ and Culture has met with considerable attention.

The precise indication of the lines of relationship and implication would require a study of the whole of Niebuhr's thought and is beyond the scope of this chapter. These lines are suggested, however, in three "fundamental convictions" prefaced to The Meaning of Revelation:

> "The first is the conviction that self-defense is the most prevalent source of error in all thinking and perhaps especially in theology and ethics."
>
> "The second idea is that the greatest source of evil in life is the absolutizing of the relative, which in Christianity takes the form of substituting religion, revelation, church or Christian morality for God."
>
> "The third conviction is that Christianity is 'permanent revolution' or metanoia which does not come to an end in this world, this life, or this time."[3]

Theology then is the non-apologetic, non-defensive, historically conditioned and relative confession of a trust directed beyond the historical. The relevance of this approach lies in its implications for social theory; how it is possible, if indeed at all, is the subject of this chapter.

The pattern of this section of the present study reflects that of the two previous chapters: the assertion of the collapse of the various rational arguments to God; the statement of the faith that exists beyond proof; a discussion of a few of the problems involved in that statement. More specifically, in terms of Niebuhr's analysis, this chapter contains an exposition of Niebuhr's observation that all intellectual "proofs" are defensive in character, grounded more in psychological need than in logical demonstration. They are, furthermore, arguments which, in developing God's being, character or essence, proceed from a somewhere to God; they are thus arguments which, a) require the subordinate character of God, and b) are incapable of establishing the "somewhere" which is their prior ground. Within this structure of the failure of proof and, distinguishing between the approaches of faith and belief, Niebuhr asserts the historical relativity of all human expression. Yet, the certainties of faith and revelation exist confessionally within the relativities of the knowing predicament. A statement of the nature of revelation within relativism concludes the first part of this chapter.

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[3] H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation (New York, 1941), pp. viii-ix. Niebuhr concludes that "positively stated these three convictions are that man is justified by grace, that God is sovereign, and that there is an eternal life."

The second and third sections develop several of the problems of "revelation within relativism." In distinguishing between inner and outer history and opposing "false gods" to "the void" Niebuhr begins to raise the suggestion of the objectivity of a revelation within the relativities of history. The difficulties involved in this departure play serious havoc with the latter half of The Meaning of Revelation and several of the shorter essays. On the one hand, when Niebuhr describes revelation he tends to minimize his relativism; on the other hand, his historical criticism of the arrogance of creedal theology allows little room for the "absolutes" of revelation: the relationship here is far from clear and constitutes a major problem within Niebuhr's epistemology.

The third section continues with comment on this problem and on a related issue running throughout the study, viz., is commitment to one or to many? If to many, how is unity of personality possible? If to one, how does change of commitment occur? In supplanting the older theories of religious knowledge Niebuhr's approach has secured for theology a considerable number of assets; it has also raised problems which are equally challenging, coming as they do at the conclusion of a denial of certainty within the relativities of history.

The work of H. Richard Niebuhr is too much involved in the present theological tides for the lines of influence to be capable of much detailed analysis. The exact sources of this work will not become clear until the origin of the power — and hence direction and end — of the entire modern movement becomes manifest. Yet a few words may be said: H. Richard Niebuhr clearly stands this side of the Barthian revolution. But his theology, and particularly the epistemology, is not merely one more statement of a popular "neo-orthodoxy." Perhaps more clearly than the rest, his thought is living proof that the only possible repudiation of the excesses of liberalism must take its stand in liberalism's triumphs. The key to Niebuhr's relativism is his prior acceptance of the critical work built on the liberal theology of the close of the nineteenth century. Specifically, he has cited his indebtedness to Troeltsch:

> "He (Troeltsch) has helped me to accept and to profit by the acceptance of the relativity not only of historical objects but, more, of the historical subject, the observer and interpreter."[4]

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[4] H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York, 1951), p. ix.

The preface to Niebuhr's epistemological The Meaning of Revelation observed influence from several quarters: D. C. Macintosh, Frank Chamberlain Porter, Henri Bergson, A. E. Taylor, Martin Buber, Emil Brunner, Paul Tillich, Robert L. Calhoun, Reinhold Niebuhr, Ernst Troeltsch, and Karl Barth. Two of these must be singled out, not so much for the strength of their broad influence, as for the categories which they supplied for the latter half of The Meaning of Revelation. If Troeltsch was an important influence in Niebuhr's acceptance of relativism, Bergson and Tillich have been equally influential in his efforts to establish some sort of stability within the relativities. Niebuhr's discussion of internal and external history[5] has striking parallels in Bergson's analysis of society in The Two Sources of Morality and Religion, although it escapes the latter's vitalistic presuppositions and conclusions. Yet the very gap created by this escape (i. e., what is the relation between the two histories?) becomes the source of a major epistemological difficulty. One tentative solution is presented in terms of "the void" into which all of the "false gods" of idolatry must ultimately fall.[6] While this resolution, involving as it does at least a superficial repudiation of the relativism, is not pressed in many of Niebuhr's other works, it may indicate an undercurrent of reliance on the stability within Paul Tillich's system.[7] Macintosh's influence is shown in the breadth of Niebuhr's background, Buber's in his concern with the personal, and his brother's in the recognition of the dynamic character of all revelation.[8] But within the framework of influences, the courage to find revelation within relativism belongs to the man himself. As in all cases of growth and education, the importance of the influence derives solely from the person influenced, and the genius of combination, exploitation, and exploration is his. In H. Richard Niebuhr, this comes to the "revelation of faith within relativism."

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[5] Cf. Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, pp. 59ff.

[6] Cf. Niebuhr, "The Nature and Existence of God," op. cit. p. 45.

[7] This thesis, and the suggestion of the location of

THE COLLAPSE OF "DEFENSIVE APOLOGETICS"

For Richard Niebuhr, as for Ritschl and James, the construction of a new religious epistemology presupposes the collapse of the traditional approaches to God. For James and Ritschl, the "proofs" of God's existence either could not be coordinated with scientific theories, or did not "prove" anything at all, or else did not prove that which they intended to prove. Although Niebuhr would endorse these evaluations of traditionalism's arguments, his analysis centers about the anthropocentric defensiveness which he discovers hidden in each

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Bergson's influence would be extremely difficult to establish with certainty. There are too few secondary sources, and the haunting lack of footnotes in the primary sources makes them small help. The thesis is, at best, an "educated guess." One might ground the uses to which "the void" are put in the thought of Luther or Kierkegaard. But in view of Niebuhr's long association with, and admiration of, Tillich it may be suggested that, whatever their source, in Niebuhr's thought this type of category has been mediated by Paul Tillich.

[8] A longer listing would have to include Kant, Schleiermacher, and Ritschl.

"proof." The uncovering of defensiveness reveals a dual weakness in all rational arguments to God: firstly, the very structure of "proof" requires that God be conceived as existing for man, as called into existence by man's needs; secondly, each argument must proceed from an accepted axiom which is itself unproven. The traditional proofs of God's existence and the descriptions of his character thus are neither compelling nor, if compelling, do they establish that which they intend. It is this internal weakness of the older arguments, in combination with his external attack from the standpoint of his recognition of the historical conditioning of all human formulations, that has led Niebuhr away from traditional approaches.

The defensiveness of all apologetics proceeds from a ubiquitous inversion of faith "whereby man puts himself into the center, constructs an anthropocentric universe and makes confidence in his own value rather than faith in God his beginning."[9] Although this apologetic type of construction may have a measure of logical consistency, it proves very little except that men will go far to ground their values outside themselves. But more importantly, anthropocentric construction is religiously unsatisfactory:

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[9] Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 31. Cf. H. Richard Niebuhr, Wilhelm Pauck, and Francis P. Miller, The Church Against the World (New York, 1935), pp. 135-136: "Capitalism and nationalism are variant forms of a faith which is more widespread in modern civilization than either. It is difficult to label this religion. It may be called humanism, but there is a humanism that, far from glorifying man, reminds him of his limitations the while it loves him in his feebleness and aspiration. It has become fashionable to name it liberalism, but there is a liberalism which is interested in human freedom as something to be achieved rather than something to be assumed and praised. It may be called modernism, but surely one can live in the modern world, accepting its science and engaging in its work without falling into idolatry of the modern. The rather too technical term 'anthropocentrism' seems to be the best designation of the faith. It is marked on its negative side by the rejection not only of the symbols of creation, the fall and the salvation of men, but also the belief in human dependence and limitation, in human weakness and frailty, in divine

> "Religion demands that God be loved for his own sake rather than for the sake of any value, high or low, material or spiritual, which he is conceived to conserve, promote or increase.....A theology which begins with values that are logically prior to God or that are of greater value than God, so that what is and what is not God may be determined by reference to them, makes Him a means to an end and confounds worship."[10]

If God is truly God He must be the source of all value; if the source of all value, he cannot be approached as the conserver of values conceived as valuable in themselves. The conserver

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forgiveness through the suffering of the innocent. Positively it affirms the sufficiency of man. Human desire is the source of all values. The mind and the will of man are sufficient instruments of his salvation."

[10] H. Richard Niebuhr, "Value Theory and Theology," in *The Nature of Religious Experience*, J. S. Bixler, ed., (New York, 1937), p. 102. The reader may wish to accuse Niebuhr of circularity at this point. On one level at least, what Niebuhr seems to be saying is that the God grounded in man's needs does not satisfy those needs. The analysis itself would seem to imply that man's needs are prior. If there is an escape from the difficulty it would seem to be that here Niebuhr is speaking confessionally; that is to say, the values which he seeks to conserve arise *out of* the previously accepted revelation but are not the *ground* of it. (*Cf.* Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, pp. 189ff.) If this is *the* case, then, *he is contending that* the Christian "proofs" do not prove the Christian God. He is also involved, if the radically "confessional" approach is pressed, in a total relativism in which his argument stands good only for one occupying an identical confessional position. However, this is only one interpretation; the matter is not resolved, because it is never quite clear whether, at any given point, Niebuhr is speaking confessionally or from a position which all are expected to grant. In large part, this vague oscillation causes the difficulties between the two halves of *The Meaning of Revelation*.

of values can have only derivative value, but this cannot be the value of God.[11]

In carrying this attack, Niebuhr has found in Albrecht Ritschl both friend and foe. He applauds Ritschl's classic statement of the Werthurtheile as a necessary correction of intellectualism's approach:

> "Ritschl's insistence on the valuational character of Christian concepts and judgments helped to clear up many confused and confusing points in Christian thought. It indicated why the intellectualist approach in theology always remained religiously unsatisfactory, why it led away from the religious community, why it tended to bring forth neither prayer nor repentance, neither adoration nor reformation."[12]

The "proofs" of intellectualism do not prove, nor is that which they intend a valid object of religious devotion. Niebuhr has gone far toward an acceptance of Ritschl's theory of value-judgments. It is no simple matter to distinguish the nineteenth-century value-judgment from Niebuhr's valuational understanding of commitment. Surely in their critiques they are in broad accord: theological truth is not the rational certainty of compelling syllogisms founded on inherently necessary premisses; rather, theological truth is the committed response of the whole person to that which is seen as supremely valuable.

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[11] Approving modern theology's recognition that religious knowledge is possible only in relation to God, Niebuhr observed that "it is in seeking to describe the value which God has for faith, or rather which He discloses to faith, that modern theology has encountered....difficulties.....For in attempting to describe what kind of value God has as God, it has either identified deity with a quality, an ideal or an abstract value, or it has made religious valuation dependent on the subject, so that deity is ascribed to a being not on account of its intrinsic nature but on account of the attitude of the subject to the object, or — in the third place — it has taken its value criterion from an anthropocentric ethics and analyzed the experience of God in terms of non-religious value." ("Value Theory and Theology", op. cit., pp. 112-113.)

[12] Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 26.

But Niebuhr is no Ritschlian. Turning from his recognition of the failure of the proofs for God's existence, Ritschl sought to ground the Christian faith in what he found to be a universal of experience.[13] Religious value-judgments, and Christian value-judgments to a pre-eminent degree, are necessary postulates in man's conviction of the superiority of his spiritual hopes to the demands of nature. Niebuhr has recognized this amendment as essentially a defensive retreat from the promise of value-judgments and, however reluctantly, has made a careful analysis of it in a few pages of The Meaning of Revelation:

> "What led Ritschl to his departure from his professed standpoint of Christian faith in God and so to inconsistency in his theology and the misdirection of Christian life was, as the context of his argument indicates, a desire to justify Christianity as the best religion.....(He) began to analyze God's nature simply from the point of view of a member of the human community confronting nature. Having said that Christian judgments are value-judgments he proceeded to set forth a value-scale which was not that of Christian faith, for which God is the highest value and could not be God were He not absolute in worth, but was rather the value-scale of civilized man....so he interprets the value of God to man through man's evaluation of himself as this appears in his self-comparison not with God but with nature."[14]

Niebuhr has recognized that in this curious oscillation Ritschl moved from a radical assertion of ungrounded value-judgment to a defensive apologetic along not unfamiliar lines. It may be that such a movement is inevitable, but in the first chapters of The Meaning of Revelation it is presented as an entirely typical defensive apologetic.[15]

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[13] Cf. supra, Chapter II.

[14] Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, pp. 32, 29, 30. This analysis is also suggested in "Value Theory and Theology," op. cit., p. 98.

Elsewhere the attack is opened against all efforts to ground faith in external certainties. A decade earlier, he had broadened the critique against Ritschl into a verdict against the bulk of nineteenth-century theology which, with its subject-centered orientation, found God as primarily an aid in the battle with nature.[16] Niebuhr has little patience with the contradictions of a view which presents a being considered divine (*i. e.*, having supreme worth) as having a derivative value. If a theology portrays God as existing for man then that theology cannot find the locus of value centered in its God.

The appeal to immediate, personal revelation also fails as a ground for theological truth. Following the traditional complaint against the privacy of mystical intuition, Niebuhr has observed that, if truly private and ineffable, the religious vision is all but useless to any but its possessor:

"It cannot be enough to say that in revelation we meet

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[15] It remains to be seen whether Niebuhr can avoid a similar oscillation. His discussion of "the void" which swallows "false gods" and his suggestion of an "objective revelation" may stand in strong contrast to the relativism argued elsewhere. *Cf. infra*, pp. 182-186.

[16] "Religion and theology were subject-centered; they were valued not as revelations or systematizations of reality nor as efforts to transcend the limits of reason and of humanity but as aids in the struggle for existence, in the self-assertion of the human spirit, in the control of life. The final fruit of this development is modern humanism with its elimination from religion of all but human objects and purposes." H. Richard Niebuhr, "Religious Realism and the 20th Century" in Religious Realism, D. C. Macintosh, ed., (New York, 1931), pp. 415-416.

> the divine self, for if this meeting is pure immediacy which does not provide us with truths about God it would remain incommunicable and unable to provide the reasoning heart with principles of understanding."[17]

Nor does Niebuhr ignore the related problem of the arbitration of differences between intuitions. Granting that, somehow, ineffable visions may have differences, if truly private they are incapable of resolution. The false prophet has no less sure a ground than the true.[18] Even if it is possible to make a private, ineffable truth consistently the basis for inter-personal faith, the grounding of theology in intuition is inevitably anarchic.

It is scarcely worth mentioning that Niebuhr recognizes the inadequacy of grounding faith in an uncritical acceptance of Scripture. Because they ignore the scholarship and discoveries of the last century and because they are essentially a defensive grasping at straws of certainty, literalistic attitudes toward the Scriptures provide no basis for faith.[19]

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[17] Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, pp. 175-176.

[18] "Yet once more we discover that visions, numinous feelings....may be interpreted in many ways. We cannot speak of inner light at all, save in ejaculations signifying nothing to other men, unless we define its character in social terms, that is in terms which come out of our history. The 'true' seed within, the 'right' spirit, can be distinguished from false seeds and evil spirits only by the use of criteria which are not purely individual and biographical." Ibid., p. 52.

[19] Cf. ibid., pp. 4, 49, 51-52. Nor has Niebuhr much sympathy with a Barthian attitude toward revelation: "Instead of recognizing their relation to Ritschlianism and value-theology in general, they deny that such a relation exists and seek to return to a type of thought which prevailed in early Protestantism. They make revelation their starting-point, but by dealing with it as though it were a bolt out of the blue and by refusing to relate it to the value cognitions of men, they fail to give an understanding of the process whereby revelation is re-

Throughout these studies of the pursuit of theological certainty Niebuhr has maintained a strong awareness of the relativities of history. This awareness, attributed in large part to the influence of Troeltsch, is most clearly shown in the analysis of theological argument from "the self-evident." If the ground of truth is the self-evident, then truth changes with time and culture for "the ideas commonly accepted in a society always appear to its members to be self-evident and inevitable."[20] Kantian duty is a rational imperative "only of any reason which has been educated, as Kant's had been, in a society in which the Judaic-Christian tradition is predominant."[21] The innate truths of a given culture can hardly be challenged within the framework of that culture, but when they purport to establish a trans-cultural universal they can do so only by an unhistorical arbitrariness. Further, as in the case of mysticism, if (culturally) private awareness is the standard of truth then there can be no arbitration between cultures. But it is not entirely clear whether Niebuhr intends that this relativism be applied only to the historical subject or whether somehow it involves the revealed object. It is, of course, Kant's problem on a social scale: does the fact of historical

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ceived. They insist upon the uniqueness of revelation, particularly upon the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, but by setting the unique revelation completely apart from other faiths, they fail to show the relation of various faiths to each other and to describe intelligibly how one faith supplants another." "Value Theory and Theology," op. cit., p. 111.

[20] Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 16.

[21] Ibid., p. 11.

conditioning of all revelation prohibit discussion of the revealed object? Whatever the case,[22] Niebuhr's recognition of the historical character of all human formulation precludes any theological approach by argument from the "self-evident."

Thus, all of the traditional paths — from reason, nature, need, vision, Scripture, and the self-evident — either fail of their object or fail to establish an object satisfactory to faith. Niebuhr has found that, in addition to their individual weaknesses, as a group they illustrate a defensiveness which frustrates the very structure of the faith which they seek to establish. For all of these reasons Niebuhr has recognized the collapse of apologetics and through his historical studies has discovered that he must conclude: "I have found myself unable to avoid the acceptance of historical relativism....." It is significant that the second clause of this discovery is: ".... yet I do not believe that the agnostic consequence is necessary."[23]

REVELATION WITHIN RELATIVISM

Perhaps the key to Niebuhr's understanding of this combination of faithful certainty within historical relativities is most clearly indicated in his description of Protestantism at its best:

> "(It) has not sought to convince a speculative, detached mind of the existence of God, but has begun with actual moral and religious experience, with the practical reason of man rather than with his speculative interests."[24]

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[22] *Cf. infra*, pp. 189-190.

[23] Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, p. vii.

[24] Niebuhr, "The Nature and Existence of God," *op. cit.*, p. 14.

Crucial to this approach is the distinction he has made between faith and belief. In highly Ritschlian language, Niebuhr writes that "Revelation as the self-disclosure of the infinite person is realized in us only through the faith which is a personal act of commitment, of confidence and trust, not of belief about the nature of things."[25] Yet, in a similar passage in another article Niebuhr hints at the problem which Ritschl's friends had to argue in his behalf: "Faith....always refers primarily to character and power rather than to existence. Existence is implied and necessarily implied; but there is no direct road from assent to the intellectual proposition that something exists to the act of confidence and reliance upon it."[26] The latter part of this distinction is echoed in The Meaning of Revelation in various historical passages observing the difficulties theology created for itself in warring with the secular world in the area of belief.[27] These were "fruitless quarrels....(which led) to internal conflict and inconsistency since (they) tended to substitute belief in the occurence of miraculous events for faith in God."[28] But more profound than the futility of such conflict is the defensiveness and anthropocentrism which Niebuhr again finds implied in the effort to make revelation a structure of belief rather than an attitude of faith. Accordingly he notes

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[25] Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 154.

[26] Niebuhr, "The Nature and Existence of God," op. cit., p. 14.

[27] Cf. Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, pp. 1-2, 3, 76, et passim.

[28] Ibid., p. 76.

> "the extent to which the faith of the church has been confounded with the belief in the ideas, wishes and sentiments of men, and to which the word God has been made the symbol, not of the last reality with which man contends, but of his own aspirations."[29]

Faith, then, is an attitude of trust, confidence, reliance; it is not an intellectual assent to propositions concerning the existential state of affairs. This is precisely the distinction Ritschl prefaced to his thesis of the value-judgment; and the problem which Ritschl's friends then had to face requires considerable clarification in Niebuhr's argument. Although there is no path from existential propositions to faithful acts of commitment, in every faith statement "existence is implied and necessarily implied." Here is the dilemma which Feuerbach and Bender have proposed to the modern reader, here the issue on which Ritschl's followers divided, and here also is the crucial and most difficult rung in James's "faith-ladder." Or, alternately, is commitment (value-judgment) noetic? If the act of faithful commitment implies recognition of the existence of the valued being, does the commitment contain anything beyond the valuing which will serve as an adequate ground for that implication? Clearly, the act of valuing contains at least a subjective assurance of the existence of the valuable; but does it contain more than this? Again, what of the commitment of the lunatic? If existence is grounded only in the act of valuing, is his ground any the less sure?

Feuerbach's alternative is theoretically unsatisfactory within this structure, for in his solution he must claim knowledge of the existence (or here, the non-existence) of the gods beyond faith. Niebuhr, along with Ritschl, would reject this as religiously impossible. Niebuhr does not treat this issue at great length; within his view it may be sufficient to observe that "existence is implied and necessarily implied." That this may be so is suggested by his assertion that Protestantism "has not sought to convince a speculative, detached mind of the existence of God, but has begun with actual moral and religious experience, with the practical reason of man rather than with his speculative interests." It may be that for the practical reason "to be valued is to exist," and that to proceed beyond this is to re-enter that land of belief which is neither religious, nor theocentric, nor fruitful. If all this is admissible,[30] Niebuhr may well be right in believing that the agnostic consequence is not necessary; yet he must make the point clearer. Because of the difficulty of the entire area it must be made very clear whether religious knowledge is restricted to that practical reason for the object of whose commitment existence is necessarily implied.[31]

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[29] Niebuhr _et al._, _The Church Against the World_, p. 150.

However Niebuhr may propose to clarify this issue, his historical studies and his conviction that religious communication is founded on the experience of the practical reason rather than on the speculations of pure reason — these have led him inexorably to one conclusion: historical relativism. The radical importance of this conclusion is indicated in the following observation:

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[30] It must be emphasized that the preceding paragraph is an interpretation. As noted, Niebuhr has not treated the problem at length; this interpretation would seem the most consistent and most in the spirit of his other theses, whatever problems it might create.

[31] This issue will reappear in many guises in the sections treating problems arising in Niebuhr's theory.

> "The understanding that the spatio-temporal point of view of an observer enters into his knowledge of reality, so that no universal knowledge of things as they are in themselves is possible, so that all knowledge is conditioned by the standpoint of the knower, plays the same role in our thinking that the idealistic discoveries of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the evolutionary discovery of the nineteenth played in the thought of earlier generations."[32]

There is little need to develop the character of Niebuhr's relativism; it is not a new discovery that men speak in the language of their culture and in terms of their present historical situation, its needs and demands. There may be some question concerning what elements in the historical situation form the structure which determines the direction of the relativities, but that relativism forms at least one viable theory of the history of ideas is today virtually beyond question. Whether that theory is ultimately sound is another issue, but the theory itself is not new with Niebuhr. What is new, however, is the force with which Niebuhr applies the relativist's approach to theology. Formerly employed primarily as a negative approach intended to destroy the very possibility of theology, or else hidden away in a few paragraphs unrelated to the body of a book, in Niebuhr relativism is proposed as a very integral part of a positive theology. This is one conclusion of a theological movement which dared to treat religious scriptures as historical documents set down by historical prophets writing within a cultural situation. It is also a complement to the conviction that faith begins with the practical reason and is not centered in intellectual curiosity. These two paths may not lead inevitably to relativism, but if they are followed the conclusion is not difficult to reach. Niebuhr's contribution is his effort to include the conclusion within an affirmative theology.

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[32] Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 7. Cf. ibid., pp. 15-18, 23; The Church Against the World, p. 4.

Although the character of Niebuhr's relativism is clear, the extent to which he means to apply it is open to some question. On the one hand, historical relativism is the thesis which serves to undercut the traditional absolutistic claims to certain knowledge of the divine order; but if it is this it must also be the framework within which the theological enterprise is carried on. Thus, in his analysis of the traditional approaches he has identified "in all such formulations (*e. g.*, the "natural order," the "law of supply and demand") elements which are thoroughly relative to historical background, to a will to believe, and to the specific interests of certain social groups."[33] In this critical evaluation is contained the clue to the other side of Niebuhr's understanding of the implications of relativism: the reader will observe that the attack is leveled against "*all such formulations*." Just as in his study of faith the existence of the object of trust is implied, "and necessarily implied,"[34] so here he seems to understand his relativism as concerned exclusively with the problems of epistemology and communication. Because this is the case, Niebuhr feels that he is able to avoid the sceptical implications of his approach:

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[33] Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, pp. 10-11.

[34] *Cf. supra*, pp. 161-163.

> "Relativism does not imply subjectivism and scepticism. It is not evident that the man who is forced to confess that his view of things is conditioned by the standpoint he occupies must doubt the reality of what he sees. It is not apparent that one who knows that his concepts are not universal, must also doubt that they are concepts of the universal, or that one who understands how all his experience is historically mediated must believe that nothing is mediated through history."[35]

Whether Niebuhr can establish this distinction will be one of the principal issues raised in the latter part of this chapter. It is essentially the question posed by the generations following Kant: the mere awareness of the historical conditioning of thought does not necessitate doubt of a trans-historical reality, but does it permit any ground for the affirmation of that reality?

Although there may be a problem here which is critical for Niebuhr's theology, in his thinking the recognition of the truths of relativism does not destroy the possibility of a genuine "I-Thou" communication. What it does do, however, is change the character of the theological method: the new theology must begin with revelation. At this point he is rigorously consistent with his critique of traditional thought.

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[35] Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, pp. 18-19. For an illustration of this understanding as implied in his critical analysis of traditional theology, cf. ibid., p. 10: "The patterns and models we employ to understand the historical world may have had a heavenly origin, but as we know and use them they are, like ourselves, creatures of history and time; though we direct our thought to eternal and transcendent beings, it is not eternal and transcendent; though we regard the universal, the image of the universal in our minds is not a universal image." For a more recent discussion of this distinction cf. "Philosophy and the Life of the Spirit" by Niebuhr's colleague, Theodore M. Greene, in The Christian Scholar, March 1955, pp. 31ff.

> "This is the sum of the matter: Christian theology must begin today with revelation because it knows that men cannot think about God save as historic, communal beings and save as believers. It must ask what revelation means for Christians rather than what it ought to mean for all men, everywhere and at all times. And it can pursue its inquiry only by recalling the story of Christian life and by analyzing what Christians see from their limited point of view in history and faith."[36]

The concept of revelation, then, is the key to that part of Niebuhr's theology which begins to build up from the relativistic analysis of much prior thinking. It is revelation which, for the faithful, affords the sure ground beneath the conditioned formulations. Or, expressed invertedly, the danger of relativistic scepticism is transcended by a trustful act of commitment. That role which is played by "value-judgment" in Ritschl's thought and by "the will to believe" in James's philosophy is filled in Niebuhr's thinking by the approach of commitment to revelation.

Niebuhr has supplied his readers with a number of descriptions of just what he means by revelation. Firstly, it is defined as the structure of a faith which makes life worth living; secondly, as the standard of value which makes particular values valuable; and thirdly, as the organizing principle of experience. Through each of these approaches there is a firm consistency which is clear, whatever the character of its implications. In very broad terms, for Niebuhr revelation is valuational in content; furthermore, it is not so much the sum of the particular values of life as it is the prior framework of value which makes the particular elements cherished. In terms of the process of judging, revelation is the unsupported ground of judgment on the basis of which all judgment is carried on, but which is itself beyond judgment. Or finally, revelation is the organizing framework which makes sense out of experience but which is not so much discovered in experience as brought by us to that experience which would not be intelligible without it.

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[36] Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 42.

Niebuhr's entire understanding of revelation proceeds from an uncomplicated insight which although extending back to the Greeks has played only a relatively minor role in the history of thought. His starting-point is the observation that in all questions of the meanings and values in life there is assumed a framework which is transcendently meaningful and valuable in that the worth of particular things are derived from it. Furthermore, this framework of meaning and value is not so much mediated to us by experience as it is that which mediates and makes intelligible to us the experience itself. Thus, in one sense at least, it stands apart from test and analysis since it is the standard of all testing and analyzing; revelation is, in short, the ground of meaning.[37]

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[37] It is in connection with this latter point, i. e., that the ground of meaning must be meaningful in and of itself and not derivatively, that Niebuhr finds much good in the recent (presumably Barthian) theological trends: "What is asserted is the absolute priority of God, and what is rejected is the assumption that prior to God, or to God's revelation of Himself, or man's experience of faith in Him, the mind is in possession

This description must be pursued through the three elaborations Niebuhr has given to it. But it must be clear at the outset that he does not mean revelation to be taken as a special body of esoteric doctrine, nor as a particular mystical vision or intuition. The delicate distinction between faith and belief must be maintained throughout: thus revelation relates to the object of faithful trust, belief has to do with specific doctrinal formulations which may or may not relate to a given revelation. The theme is developed in three patterns in Niebuhr's writings.

In 1943, in an article on "The Nature and Existence of God" Niebuhr developed Luther's thesis that "Trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and idol.....For the two, faith and God, hold close together. Whatever then thy heart clings to....and relies upon, that is properly thy God."[38] His theme is the now-familiar one that in the business of living all men direct their plans and energies toward some focus which they see as filling their lives with meaning or, in religious terms, which they perceive as salvific.[39] For each individual the apprehension of this focus is revelation and its

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of a valid standard by means of which it can judge God and His revelation." "Value Theory and Theology," op. cit., p. 111.

[38] Op. cit., p. 43.

[39] "It is a curious and inescapable fact about our lives, of which I think we all become aware at some time or another, that we cannot live without a cause, without some object of devotion, some center of worth, something on which we rely for our meaning. In this sense all men have faith because they are men and cannot help themselves....." Ibid., p. 15, cont. on p. 43.

location is the locus of deity. From this approach, then, Niebuhr is able to conclude that "to have faith and to have a god is one and the same thing."[40] At first blush this analysis would appear to be a new proof for the existence of the gods, but in this article at least, such does not seem to be Niebuhr's intent. His analysis remains at the psychological level and argues not so much the existence of the gods as the existence of faith. The former issue arises in such phrases as "existence (of the object of worship) is implied, and necessarily implied," and must be treated shortly. But what is important at this stage of analysis is the human role which Niebuhr assigns to revelation: whatever its nature, whether directed toward the self, escape, Buddha, Christ or Krishna, revelation is the apprehension of a center of meaning which serves "to make life worth living," to focus and give meaning to the things we meet and on which we act. As such, and whatever its metaphysical referent, revelation (commitment, faith) is a universal, psychological phenomenon.

In two widely separated, yet thoroughly consistent articles[41] Niebuhr has developed the same theme in connection with an analysis of value-theory. Finding much that is good in the work of the value-theorists, he continues his discussion of revelation in the argument that all value-theory must be relational in character:

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[40] Ibid., p. 43.

[41] "Value Theory and Theology" (1937); H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Center of Value" in Moral Principles of Action, Ruth Nanda Anshen, ed., (New York, 1952).

> "Whatever may be the general reflections of value-theorists on the meaning and nature of 'good,' when they deal with more concrete ethical problems they usually employ a relational theory of value which defines good by reference to a being for which other beings are good."[42]

Just as the focus of meaning described in the paragraph above is what Niebuhr means by deity, so here the general observation of the necessity of a center of value leads back to that religious object which is the prior ground of all valuing:

> "In view of this necessity of beginning with a value-center it seems evident that every theory of value, so far as it is relational, is religious in character. Every such theory adopts as its explicit or implicit starting-point some being or beings in relation to which good is judged to be good and evil evil, in relation to which also the rightness or wrongness of its relations to other beings is examined. The question of the goodness of this central being for other beings is usually not considered....."[43]

The final point of this observation is echoed in the earlier article which remarked that "a theology which seeks to evade the dogmas of religion by founding itself upon ethics does not evade dogmatism, since every ethics rests at last upon a dogmatic basis."[44] The fundamental observation remains the same throughout: in the area of meaning and value, all discourse and judgment is carried on within a prior framework which is taken as supremely meaningful and valuable and from which the particular elements of life receive their worth derivatively. Now, just as this focus of meaning or center of value is what Niebuhr means by deity, so the apprehension of it is what he means by revelation. Again, it must be noted that, except for the undercurrent that "existence is implied and necessarily implied," the analysis has remained primarily on the level of valuing or faith. As such, it has argued for the ubiquity of revelation of one sort or another.

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[42] Niebuhr, "The Center of Value," op. cit., p. 162.

[43] Ibid., p. 172.

[44] Niebuhr, "Value Theory and Theology," op. cit., p. 105.

Niebuhr's third description of revelation forms the central part of The Meaning of Revelation.[45] In this passage, revelation is set forth as "the intelligible event which makes all other events intelligible," or as "a rational principle for the understanding of present experience."[46] It must be remarked that while "intelligible" and "rational principle" may make Niebuhr's point quite clear when employed very broadly, they do carry an unfortunate burden of connotations. Although he does not make the point quite explicit, Niebuhr cannot mean to imply any of the conclusions of traditional eighteenth century thought; rather, "intelligible" and "rational" must be taken as referring to "meaning" for the self and not to any inherent metaphysical structures. Again, at this stage at least, Niebuhr's discussion of revelation remains concerned with psychological and personal, not ontological, truths. He writes alternately of revelation as the "dramatic pattern" which the heart uses to understand life's meaning.[47] This use of revelation is demonstrated in an eloquent passage treating the international writhings of 1939-1941: "We see through the use of the great parable how bodies are now being broken for our sake and how for the remission of our sins the blood of innocents is being shed."[48] Or again, "when we attempt to interpret our experience by means of revelation we return to a critical point in man's conversation with God and try to understand the present as a continuation from that beginning."[49]

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[45] Pp. 91-137.

[46] Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, pp. 93, 129.

[47] Ibid., p. 110.

Revelation, then, may be considered as a rational principle in the sense that upon its acceptance intelligence can begin to find meaning in current experience. Thus far in his analysis, revelation is taken to refer more to structures of meaning than to structures of ontology. At least as this reader understands Niebuhr's thesis, he does not mean that revelation is discovered in present experience,[50] but rather that it is brought by the faithful to that experience and that it is because of this revelation that the experience is intelligible, _i. e._, is made meaningful.[51] If so, it is in full accord with the other descriptions; the three definitions may be used interchangeably: revelation is that trust which gives meaning to life, making it worth living; it is the structure of value to which all particular values are related and from which they receive their worth derivatively; it is that event of personal history which illuminates and makes intelligible all of the other events of that history. Revelation then is the active structure of meaning and value in personal biography.[52] It must be noted that, at least in this understanding of Niebuhr's analysis, because he has not focused revelation as a body of doctrine or a pattern of vision, there is nothing thus far in the description of revelation which runs counter to his acceptance of historical relativism. Many revelations are possible if the role of revelation is to focus life's energies, to provide a standard of value, or to make intelligible the random items of experience.

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[48] _Ibid._, p. 124.

[49] _Ibid._, p. 129.

[50] Although elsewhere he may contend that it is "validated" there.

[51] _Cf._ Niebuhr, _The Meaning of Revelation_, p. 138: "When we speak of revelation we mean that something has happened to us in our history which conditions all our thinking and that through this happening we are enabled to apprehend what we are, what we are suffering and doing and what our potentialities are. What is otherwise arbitrary and dumb fact becomes related, intelligible and eloquent fact through the revelatory event."

Because many of the terms which Niebuhr has employed to describe revelation center on its functional utility, a brief digression is necessary in order to separate his analysis from the type of anthropocentrism which characterizes Ritschl's theology. The final passages of The Meaning of Revelation assert that while revelation fills a genuine need, in so doing it radically transforms the perception of that need.[53] The distinctive feature of the confusion introduced by the anthropocentric fallacy is that, in the last analysis, the character of perceived human needs dictates the character of deity and revelation. The valid contribution of the line of thought which may lead to anthropocentrism is its observation that revelation must always be relevant to man's present situation of need. In contending that revelation both fills and transforms human need,[54] Niebuhr has sought to keep revelation both relevant and god-centered. In so doing he has shown another of its facets: its constantly revolutionary character.[55]

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[52] The use of "personal" does not necessarily mean "private;" some communal revelations are possible insofar as we share a communal biography.

[53] The reader of The Meaning of Revelation will note that one of its most difficult features is the shift in analysis which takes place between the first and second halves of the book. While the first section may be treated as a general discussion of revelation, the second part is concerned primarily with the Christian revelation. Thus, the context of his description of the revolutionary and transforming character of revelation (and thus his effort to overcome an anthropocentric approach) is explicitly Christian. But although this is the context, it would not seem to be the inevitable limitations of the description. There would appear to be at least several

The Niebuhr who describes the role of revelation and the Niebuhr who accepts the thesis of historical relativism are most clearly bound together in the new program set out for theology. If, on the one hand, all thought, including the religious, is subject to historical conditioning, that is, if every

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revelations (*e. g.*, the work of the bodhisattva, the message of a genuinely self-less friendship, prolonged commitment to a cause) which grow out of human want but may be capable of transforming the character of that need. A general statement of Niebuhr's point would seem to be that "Revelation imparts no new beliefs about nature or historical facts; it does involve the radical reconstruction of all our beliefs, since these always reflect both human provincialism and concern for self with all its idols as well as objective knowledge." (*The Meaning of Revelation*, p. 172.) If this is the case, although the context of Niebuhr's attempt to avoid a merely anthropocentric description of revelation is Christian, the argument would appear to be capable of wider application.

[54] "....the goodness that shines upon us through the moment of revelation is not the glory or the goodness we had expected in our thought about deity." "....puts our expectations to shame." *Ibid.*, p. 189.

[55] *Cf. ibid.*, p. 190: "Revelation is not the development and not the elimination of our natural religion; it is the revolution of the religious life."

religious message proceeds from a point of view, and if, on the other hand, revelation is that event which makes our present experience meaningfully intelligible, then the work of the faithful community cannot be apologetic or defensive, but rather confessional. It is in the task of confessing its faith (in the sense of proclaiming, but not debating) that the community created by any revelation finds its true vocation. Niebuhr has indicated that historical conditioning requires this sort of approach:

> "If the historical limitations of all thought about God demand that theology begin consciously with and in an historical community, its limitations as an inquiry into the nature of the object of faith require it to begin in faith and therefore in a particular faith, since there is no other kind."[56]

And although confessional theology is thus required by the recognition of historical conditioning, it is made possible by the nature of revelation:

> "Whatever other men may say we can only confess, as men who live in history, that through our history a compulsion has been placed upon us and a new beginning offered us which we cannot evade."[57]

Throughout his analysis of the new confessional task for the faithful community Niebuhr has been thoroughly aware of his critique of the traditional theological enterprise. In seeking to prove a body of Christian beliefs it had subordinated the object of religious trust to a ground conceived as prior and necessary, _e. g._, man's natural needs, the rational law, the demands of social integration. When this effort is finally seen as destructive of the very deity it seeks to preserve, when conditioning is grasped as an inevitable factor in thought, and when revelation is taken as the trust which provides a framework of meaning for history, then theology "cannot, it is evident, be an offensive or defensive enterprise which undertakes to prove the superiority of Christian faith to all other faiths; but it can be a confessional theology which carries on the work of self-criticism and self-knowledge in the church."[58]

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[56] _Ibid._, p. 37.

[57] _Ibid._, p. 191. Again, the context of this passage is explicitly Christian; yet it would seem to apply to a great variety of revelations.

The outline of Niebuhr's thinking in the area of religious knowledge and communication leads boldly to the conclusion that in a world of relativities faith and revelation can be genuine realities. The critical work of his thought is twofold: 1) the recognition that religious reflection, as indeed all reflection, is thoroughly conditioned by the cultural situation and needs of the thinker and that this reflection can be proclaimed as universally valid solely by an unwarranted tour de force; and, 2) the observation that the defensive attempt to ground the particular object of a particular faith in a structure portrayed as prior to that faith is basically a denial of that faith and a repudiation of its god. Within this critical framework, revelation stands as the prior affirmation of a structure of meaning which can make experience intelligible. As such, a given revelation is not grounded elsewhere, but is itself the ground of all the other elements which are seen as valuable or meaningful. It provides a personal, if not a trans-personal,[59] stability within the relativities. These factors combine to require, therefore, that all of our thinking and communication in this area be confessional in character. Whatever transcendent pattern might be visible from a trans-historical point of view, the human situation is such that faith and revelation are inevitably particular and biographical. And to appeal the truth of a given revelation beyond itself is to manipulate the locus of deity as well as to fail to escape the dogmatic ground of the authority of that higher court. The implications of this view of the human situation, as well as Niebuhr's further descriptions of it, raise a number of questions which must now be traced.

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[58] Ibid., p. 18. Niebuhr has found this confessional procedure for modern theology quite in accord with the work of the early church: "The preaching of the early Christian church was not an argument for the existence of God nor an admonition to follow the dictates of some common human conscience, unhistorical and supersocial in character. It was primarily a simple recital of the great events connected with the historical appearance of Jesus Christ and a confession of what had happened to the community of disciples." (Ibid., p. 43.)

PROBLEMS OF REVELATION WITHIN RELATIVISM

In a passage reminiscent of both Bergson and Buber,[60] Niebuhr develops a two-aspect theory of history which he feels is required for his doctrine of revelation.

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[59] Whatever Niebuhr's conclusions concerning the validation of revelation, he insists, as did James, that value exists only where there is a valuer: "....if anything existed in itself and by itself, even the universe, value would not be present. Value is the *good-forness* of being for being in their reciprocity, their animosity, and their mutual aid. Value cannot be defined or intuited in itself for it has no existence in itself and nothing is valuable in itself but everything has value, positive or negative, in its relations. Thus value is not a relation but arises in the relation of being to being." "The Center of Value," *op. cit.*, p. 169. The similarity here to James's universe of two souls on a rock in the sea is unmistakable.

[60] Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, pp. 59-90.

> "Events may be regarded from the outside by a non-participating observer; then they belong to the history of things. They may be apprehended from within, as items in the destiny of persons and communities; then they belong to a life-time and must be interpreted in a context of persons with their resolutions and devotions."[61]

This division of history into external and inner is, he feels, a direct consequence of the recognition that all knowing is conditioned by the knower's point of view.[62] Some might wish to press Niebuhr at this point, arguing that, if revelation or faith is the scheme of meaning which makes the random particulars of experience intelligible, there can really be no such thing as "external history." While this may create some serious hazards, at least with Niebuhr's form of expression, it does perhaps miss the purpose of his argument. Once again, with a firm awareness of the pitfalls of defensive apologetics and the extent of historical conditioning, Niebuhr's contention is that the locus of revelation is not to be found in the area of the public and verifiable. Whatever the character of "external history" (in this sense), revelation is the structuring of the personal, or inner, life. This point is argued by reference to the faith of the Christian community:

> "When the evangelists of the New Testament and their successors pointed to history as the starting-point of their faith and of their understanding of the world it was internal history that they indicated. They did not speak of events, as impersonally apprehended, but rather of what had happened to them in their community."[63]

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[61] _Ibid._, p. 63.

[62] _Ibid._, p. 81.

[63] _Ibid._, p. 72. _Cf._ _ibid._, p. 74: "The error frequently

Thus the primary purpose of this analysis of history is a repetition and affirmation of the program outlined in the preceding pages: theology must be resolutely confessional if revelation is the personal (or communal) structuring of events in a world of relativities in which appeal beyond revelation is both self-defeating and impossible.

Although such may be Niebuhr's purpose in distinguishing inner and external history, this distinction raises in sharp focus a problem which has run through his entire discussion. If revelation is the structuring of events, what relation do the events have to the structure? If faith is the structure of value which gives worth to events, can the events in any way determine the character of the value attributed to them? Can external history break in on the realm of inner history?

Niebuhr has recognized this issue and found it to be, at best, a dilemma. In a section exactly duplicating the positions of Ritschl and James, Niebuhr has stated that "there is a descriptive and there is a normative knowledge of history and neither type is reducible to the terms of the other."[64] Yet there is a danger in this bifurcation of human life: "how to think in two-worldly terms without lapsing into di-theism remains a

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made in the Christian community which has been the occasion for the rise of many difficulties in understanding and propagating the historical faith has been the location of revelation in external history or in history as known from the non-participating point of view."

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 67. *Cf.* Ritschl's separation of "theoretic" and "religious" knowledge; James's distinction between "existential proposition" and propositions of value."

problem of great import for faith."[65] And while it is a problem for which there may be no speculative answer,[66] there is a practical solution in which the dualism of the two histories may be overcome in the functional unity of the event. This practical solution has two aspects: in the first place, "every external history of ourselves, communicated to us, becomes an event in inner history;"[67] and secondly, the structuring character of the revelation in inner history requires that "external" history be viewed, however dimly, as somehow the further elaboration of the structure revealed internally.[68] There is a real question whether this working solution can stand as anything more than a temporary expedient. Niebuhr seems to perceive this in his observation that "the paradox remains."[69]

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[65] Ibid., p. 83. Niebuhr has refused to overcome the tensions of this dualism by an arbitrary denial of the validity of one of the two worlds: "The distinctions between the two types of history cannot be made by applying the value-judgment of true and false but must be made by reference to differences of perspective. There are true and false appeals to memory as well as true and false descriptions but only uncritical dogmatism will affirm that truth is the prerogative of one of the points of view." (Ibid., p. 63.)

[66] Cf. ibid., p. 83: "There is no speculative escape from the dilemma, that is to say, we cannot absorb internal history into external history nor yet transcend both practical and objective points of view in such a way as to gain a knowledge of history superior to both and able to unite them into a new whole."

[67] Ibid., p. 85. As illustration, Niebuhr suggests that "the outside view of democracy offered by Marxists has become an event in the inner history of democracy. It has responded to that external view with defense but also with self-criticism and reformation."

[68] Cf. ibid., p. 86.

[69] Ibid., p. 82.

While this may be the only answer, the reader is tempted to insist that if one world draws its content from another, which is unintelligible without the first, the dualism either must be radical in character or else it must ultimately evaporate in the theoretic subordination of one history to the other. Either revelation is the radically private affirmation of meaning, or as a structure it is to some appreciable extent prestructured by the world it seeks to make intelligible.

While it is clear that Niebuhr has seen the weakness of a radical dichotomy between these two worlds, or between revelation and public event, it is our interpretation that in the latter part of The Meaning of Revelation and in several articles he has sought to reduce the dualism through a partial subordination of inner history to a future validation by external history.

In a brief passage in The Meaning of Revelation Niebuhr discusses "progressive revelation." Although the details of this section are concerned with the historical development of the Hebraic-Christian tradition, its more general discussion deals with the "validation" of revelation. The procedure of this validation appears to be that the revelation of inner history can be, in time, somewhat confirmed by its ability to organize the data of external history.

> "A revelation which furnishes the practical reason with a starting-point for the interpretation of past, present and future history is subject to progressive validation. The more apparent it becomes that the past can be understood, recovered and integrated by means of a reasoning starting with revelation, the more contemporary experience is enlightened and response to new situations aptly guided by this imagina-

> tion of the heart, the more a prophecy based on this truth is fulfilled, the surer our conviction of *its reality* becomes."[70]

> "To the extent that revelation furnishes the practical reason with an *adequate* starting point it may be said to be validated."[71]

The only inference which can be drawn from this observation is that some revelations offer an "adequate" starting point and others do not. But if this is so, then there must be something in external history which dictates, at least partially, the structural form of internal history. Events are no longer merely raw fact capable of being structured, but have in themselves a power of structuring[72] which, to a degree, places the truth of revelation outside the personal life. Or, to put the difficulty another way — in terms of Niebuhr's critique of traditional theology, if revelation is open to validation there must exist a ground or standard which is formally prior to it. If "our conviction of (a revelation's) reality" becomes surer as it meets with continuing success in the interpretation of external data, then it would seem that the reality of that revelation is derivative and its truth dependent on external data.

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[70] Ibid., p. 132 (Italics mine).

[71] *Ibid.*, p. 138 (Italics mine). Niebuhr does guard against the misunderstanding which would interpret revelation as a tentative hypothesis held only on condition of verification: "When we speak of revelation we do not mean that a tentative hypothesis, however great, has been offered to us and that this hypothesis must be validated by its fruitful use before it is acceptable. We do not mean that we have freely chosen one section of our history because we found that it made sense of the remainder. We mean rather that something has happened which compels our faith and which requires us to seek rationality and unity in the whole of our history." (*Ibid.*, p. 139.) While this qualification is quite in accord with the earlier description of revelation and with the critique of traditional theology, this reader must ask why, if "compel" is meant seriously, the issue of "validate" should be raised at all.

[72] Or at least the power to break certain structures.

This problem is more sharply outlined in a series of related articles describing false gods, idols, and the "void" into which they must fall. The origin of these discussions is quite consistent with Niebuhr's thesis that all men must stand somewhere in faith, that their lives must cohere in attention to one or another being conceived as having supreme worth — that there is no such thing as a faithless situation.[73] And in the bulk of his writings he seems content to observe that in a given time any number of such faith-positions is possible. However, scattered through some of these articles there appears to be the tendency to treat many of the gods (centers of value) as "idols" and their revelations as "undependable." In one of these passages, Niebuhr has asserted that "idolatry"

> "issues in a false morality, which sets up ideals that do not correspond to *the nature of human life* and promulgates laws that are not *the laws of reality* but the decrees of finite, self-aggrandizing and vanishing power."[74]

A similar passage in *The Meaning of Revelation* observes that

> "The necessity in believing in a god is given with the life of selves, but what gods are dependable, which of them can be counted on day after day and which are idols — products of erroneous imagination — cannot be known save through the experiences of inner history."[75]

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[73] *Cf. ibid.*, p. 37.

[74] Niebuhr, *etal.*, *The Church Against the World*, p. 125 (Italics mine).

[75] P. 80.

On the surface at least,[76] this is a considerable departure from the unavoidable "acceptance of historical relativism."

The full nature of this departure is clearest in a small article describing the failure of idolatry. The use of the "void" surrounding the idols (a term, and perhaps a concept, which may have been borrowed from Paul Tillich) most clearly implies a structuring character in external history which dictates the revelation of the inner life:

> "What is it that is responsible for this passing, that dooms our human faith to frustration? We may call it the nature of things, we may call it fate, we may call it reality. But by whatever name we call it, this law of things, this reality, this way things are, is something with which we must reckon. We may not be able to give a name to it, calling it only the 'void' out of which everything comes and to which everything returns, though that is also a name. But it is there — the last shadowy and vague reality, the secret of existence by virtue of which things come into being, are what they are, and pass away. Against it there is no defense. This reality, this nature of things, abides when all else passes. It is the source of all things and the end of all. It surrounds our life as the great abyss into which all things plunge and as the great source whence they all come. What it is we do not know save that it is and that it is the supreme reality with which we must reckon."[77]

Elsewhere these gods are described as finite in character, making only finite claims on man in time, and hence inadequate for the long pull.[78] Here then is the assertion of an external reality which sets the preconditions of faith, and here is an assertion that is hardly compatible with the view that "there is a descriptive and there is a normative knowledge of history and neither type is reducible to the terms of the other."

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[76] *Cf. infra*, pp. 192-194.

[77] Niebuhr, "The Nature and Existence of God," *op. cit.*, p. 45.

[78] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

COMMENTS ON THESE AND OTHER PROBLEMS

Of the many critical reviews of The Meaning of Revelation, two must be selected as particularly applicable to a study of these problems. Nels F. S. Ferré, in a review for Christendom, turns aside at the very foundation of Niebuhr's procedure; the main difficulty of the book, he finds, "is that it builds revelation on relativism. These ideas, indeed, clash with all violence."[79] While this may be right, it all depends, in Professor Joad's phrase, on what you mean by revelation. Ferré's understanding of the term is made quite clear in the context of another criticism:

> "Niebuhr's interpretation of revelation also raises serious questions with respect to Christian missions since the witness outside the Christian community is meaningless and since also its claim to universal truth in Christ is deemed untrue and arrogant."[80]

A number of things must be said at this point: a) it is highly doubtful that Niebuhr's recognition of the arrogance of claims to universal truth necessitates an assertion of their falsity; b) Niebuhr might well question whether the Christian revelation is rightly considered as having a claim to universal truth;[81] c) while serious questions may be raised about the character of missions, they may remain a meaningful enterprise, as they were in the early period, if they are taken as the compulsive and confessional proclamation of good news.[82] Finally, Ferré's observation that "Niebuhr accepts relativism, not from the nature of the Christian revelation, but as a necessary presupposition for modern knowledge"[83] is probably quite justified, but hardly constitutes a reproach. Niebuhr might well append to it his conviction that relativism does not do violence to the content of the faith of the earliest Christian community.

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[79] Nels F. S. Ferré, "The Revelatory Moment Within The Historic Faith," Christendom, VI, No. 3, p. 440.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Cf. Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, pp. 72, 74.

In another review, George F. Thomas raises the same question: "....Niebuhr seems to go beyond empirical theology and to embrace a historical relativism which would logically rule out all absolute truth in theology."[84] Feeling that Niebuhr has not made his point entirely clear, Thomas offers an evaluation of several interpretations. On the one hand, if Niebuhr means that there is no Christian truth absolute and universal in its validity, this would "render impossible confessional no less than apologetic or natural theology. For surely the confessional theologian accepts at least the essentials of Christian faith as absolutely true, however little he may believe he should 'defend' or 'prove' them to others."[85] The only comment which can be made here is that while revelation, as the structure of inner history, may be absolutely true for that history there is no way for it to be claimed as universally valid without appeal to a prior ground whose authority might similarly be called into question. Thomas's other interpretation perhaps strikes closer to a serious difficulty for Niebuhr:

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[82] Cf. Niebuhr's discussion of the faith of the early Christian community, ibid., passim.

[83] Ferré, "The Revelatory Moment Within the Historic Faith," op. cit., p. 440.

[84] George F. Thomas, review of The Meaning of Revelation in Journal of Religion, XXI, No. 4, p. 456.

[85] Ibid.

> "Since Niebuhr clearly believes in the importance of theology, however, he may mean that there are absolute truths in Christianity but that these can only be confessed by faith and not defended by reason. If this is his meaning his position is not that of historical relativism — for this denies absolute truth altogether — but that of theological irrationalism."[86]

While Niebuhr has indicated that he finds severe limitations in a purely Barthian approach to revelation,[87] it must be conceded that the breadth of the gap between his two aspects of history does leave him open to this charge. It is because of this difficulty that Niebuhr has attempted to introduce a description of the subtle interactions between the internal and external worlds.[88]

Whatever the weight of his critical judgments, Thomas is quite justified in observing that Niebuhr's description of revelation is not entirely clear. In the preceding discussion of Niebuhr's theory the difficulties or obscurities arising at several points have been indicated. Three of these questions deserve further examination in the closing pages of this chapter: a) to what extent does Niebuhr intend his relativism to apply; b) to what extent does this understanding of revelation permit one to speak of the origin of, and changes in, revelation; c) in what terms can Niebuhr speak of the "validation" of revelation.

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[86] *Ibid.* There may be a minor confusion in Thomas's description of relativism. What historical relativism challenges is the propriety of any claim to the *perception* of absolute truth; it has no basis for denying absolute truth *per se*.

[87] *Cf.* Niebuhr, "Value Theory and Theology," *op. cit.*, p. 111.

[88] *Cf. supra*, pp. 180-182.

In the preceding discussion of the role of relativism in theology,[89] it has been observed that Niebuhr's relativistic critique is directed toward the formulations of faith. Yet in many parts of this analysis he holds out the suggestion that while the statements of faith are subject to historical conditioning, there is no reason to deny the reality of their referent. "We need not doubt that the categorical imperative contains a universal meaning but Kant's formulations of it are historically relative."[90] Niebuhr has illustrated his bold assertion that relativism does not imply subjectivism and scepticism as follows: "It is not evident that the man who is forced to confess that his view of things is conditioned by the standpoint he occupies must doubt the reality of what he sees."[91] Again, it must be remarked that while it would require occupation of a non-historical (and hence impossible) standpoint to provide the reason why a man "must doubt the reality of what he sees," it would require the same sort of standpoint to provide reason to *affirm* its reality. The burden of the problem is that the historical conditioning of all affirmations makes impossible *any* judgment concerning the structure, or even the reality of the trans-historical. In a way, this is Epimenides' problem with the Cretan liar, but since the difficulty is not semantic no "theory of types" is available to enable us to step outside the circle. To press Niebuhr very strictly, the historical conditioning of all propositions precludes any assertion beyond inner history concerning the object of faith. To be sure, one cannot *deny* the external reality of that which he perceives from his conditioned perspective; but similarly, neither can ~~he~~ *affirm* it — for this too would require a trans-historical perspective. Niebuhr seems to recognize this dilemma in his references to the comparable problem in empiricism, a problem which some empiricists attempt to resolve by the "animal faith" in the real existence of an external world.[92] The implication is that the faithful relativist's dilemma must be resolved in a similar manner. There is a difference, however, which Niebuhr does not remark: the public character of the empiricist's method is not fully comparable to the radically private revelation of inner history. Unless Niebuhr is willing to rest content with a bewildering pluralism — not of faiths — but of referents beyond faith, it would appear that this difference is considerable. Much to be preferred is Niebuhr's original contention that all efforts to get beyond faith are vain.

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[89] Supra, pp. 160-167.

[90] Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 11.

[91] Ibid., p. 18. There is a very close parallel here to Jaspers' description of that absolute truth which is not universally valid. Cf. Karl Jaspers, The Perrenial Scope of Philosophy, New York: Philosophical Library, 1949, pp. 90-91.

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[92] *Cf.* Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, pp. 20, 79-80.

A second, and related, problem arises out of the fact that for some men the revelation, which forms the inner life and formulates the items of public life, changes. There is very little suggestion in Niebuhr's writings of how this change, or indeed the origin, of revelation in the personal life occurs. The one clue is contained in those passages which describe the inevitable value-organization of the inner lives of all men: "Man as a practical, living being never exists without a god or gods; some things there are to which he must cling as the sources and goals of his creativity, the centers of value." Niebuhr suggests that this is far from inevitably a unified organization; indeed, "as a rule men are polytheists, referring now to this and now to that valued being as the source of life's meaning. Sometimes they live for Jesus' God, sometimes for country and sometimes for Yale."[93] If this is the case, if we live with a multiplicity of revelations, then a shift in worship is readily described. It can arise from the warfare between conflicting loyalties, from the inevitable tensions of a multiplicity of values. But while this may provide a satisfactory description of changing faiths it raises a further question not so readily treated. It would seem that in any relocation of trust there must be a standard of measurement in terms of which the relocating is carried on. There must be some factor beyond the loyalties which determines that the particular conflict shall occur at this place and at this time. On the one hand, if this factor is itself of the type of revelation, then we are not serious polytheists at all and every relocation of value is merely a straightening out of value-relationships within a value-standard which is basically one. On the other hand, if the factor behind changing faith is not of the order of revelation, we have come far from the axiom that inner history is not reducible to the terms of external history. The route of this path is very obscure: the first alternative makes radical change of faith impossible — but even if this is theoretically satisfactory it does not answer the question of the origin of faith; the second alternative clearly implies a structuring element in external history which dictates the time and course of change in internal history.

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[93] *Ibid.*, p. 77. *Cf.* Niebuhr, "The Nature and Existence of God," *op. cit.*, pp. 43-45. William James described a similar multiplicity in a letter to N. S. Shaler: "'We worship,' he says, 'rather like polytheists....a collection of beings who have contributed and are now contributing to the realization of ideals more or less like those for which we live ourselves. This more pluralistic style of feeling seems to me both to allow of a warmer sort of loyalty to our past helpers and to tally more exactly with the mixed condition in which we find the world as to its ideals.'" *Letters* 2:155, cited in J. S. Bixler, *Religion in The Philosophy of William James*, pp. 61-62.

Thirdly, the difficulty is sharpened in the suggestions of a "validation of revelation."[94] These suggestion, it will be recalled, turn on the description of an "idolatry" which "issues in a false morality, which sets up idols that do not correspond to the nature of human life and promulgates laws that are not the laws of reality....." Once again, the only inference that this reader can draw from such identification of "false morality," "idolatry," "the nature of human life," and "the laws of reality" is that Niebuhr has not intended his relativism to be thorough-going, and that there is a sure and certain ground from which the revelations of men can be judged. This is in severe conflict with his earlier analysis of traditional theology. It would appear virtually axiomatic to this reader that he who begins with a relativism must end with a relativism, and that the identification of idolatry is, by its very nature, impossible. On the one hand, if this sure ground of judgment is of the type of revelation then the relativism has been arbitrarily broken; on the other hand, if it is taken generally as confirmation or negation by future experience the description of the very nature of revelation is severely revised.

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[94] Cf. supra, pp. 182-184.

One further interpretation is possible, _viz._, that in his shift from the discussion of revelation within relativism to his critique of idolatry Niebuhr has shifted from a descriptive analysis of his subject to a confessional statement about it. This has been the interpretation of a number of his reviewers and is, upon occasion, remarked by Niebuhr.[95] If this is the case, it must be made _very_ clear to the reader. While such an interpretation would remove a number of difficulties in Niebuhr's work it would also undercut a number of his articles as well as the entire latter half of _The Meaning of Revelation_. Although the discussions of idolatry and false morality may contain meaning when reinterpreted as confessional, this reader does not see how this interpretation allows any meaning to statements of "the laws of reality" or "adequate starting points." It is difficult to see any sense at all in which one can speak confessionally of the inadequacy of another starting point. The only standard of adequacy must be contained in the confession itself, and it is hardly surprising that in these terms another confession does appear inadequate. But if this is the situation, it is difficult to see how this is a reproach at all. But, to be rigorously fair to Niebuhr, the matter is not clear. It may be that such an interpretation is valid — but if so, the entire discussion of the validation of revelation must be ignored, or else reinterpreted as radically personal and subjective, if this does not introduce a contradiction. This reader is hesitant to adopt such an interpretation. It would virtually empty such articles as "The Nature and Existence of God" of all meaning, and would seriously conflict with the entire pattern of The Meaning of Revelation. While it might resolve a number of theoretic problems,[96] it does not seem fully faithful to Niebuhr's writings.

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[95] _E. g._, Niebuhr, _et al._, _The Church Against the World_, p. 125.

These three areas, viz., the extent of relativism, origin and change in revelation, the validation of revelation, remain as problems in Niebuhr's works. But they are issues which may not be inevitably insurmountable barriers; at worst they are dilemmas arising out of his bold departure from traditional theology. They are the products of a dual focus: the recognition of the extent and implications of historical conditioning, and the subjective assurance of a commitment which asserts itself beyond the self. At best, these issues are suggestive challenges; they will be taken as such, and pursued a little further, in the concluding chapter.

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[96] Although not the problem of the origin and relocation of faith.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The central chapters of this dissertation have not attempted to relate the three authors under study. They are, quite clearly, not all members of a single school, nor have they revolted against precisely the same conditions. The lines of influence are difficult, if not impossible, to draw; there is scarcely a movement from one man to another. Yet, as the table of contents for each chapter may indicate, there is a continuity which binds all three in a broad accord: each has found the traditional attempts at the formation of a religious epistemology lacking. Moreover, in turning from the traditional expressions of the structure of religious knowledge, each has found himself re-expressing the religious situation in terms for which "judgment," "will," or "commitment" are central. For each, in the sphere of religion, valuing is an intimate part of knowing.

The major chapters have attempted to locate for each man the sources of traditionalism's weaknesses, to trace the lines of the substitute which each proposed, and to point out in some detail the problems involved in each argument. This final chapter will follow the same outline and, rather than pursuing further detailed criticisms of the individual authors, will attempt to draw out a number of general conclusions concerning the broad path which all three followed. While the terms of each theory created for its author certain assets and specific problems, in the wider perspective, the general orientation of the three views gives rise to advantages and issues which may be discussed apart from the specific theories of the three men. In this sense, then, this final chapter is an attempt to look beyond the precise formulations of the authors to the nature of the issues inherent in their general approach.

THEORETIC AND RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

The movement toward what may be termed a valuational theology proceeds from a prior rejection of the more traditional statements of man's knowledge of God. Many of the technical difficulties of the traditional positions have been reviewed in the preceding chapters. Ritschl, James, and Niebuhr have seen that apart from the formal weaknesses involved in each of the arguments stands the overriding consideration that every attempt to account for the religious situation in non-religious terms contradicts itself. The God of rationalism is ruled by the dictates of reason, the "transcendent" deity whose existence is postulated by the needs of man is governed by those needs. If the religious situation involves communication with more than a necessary construct of ontology — that is, if deity is somehow moral — then the integrity of our knowledge of God must not be violated by subordination to a standard conceived as grounded apart from God.

The matter may be put another way: in dealing with all value a standard of value is implied. It is clear, furthermore, that the standard of value, if it is truly the prior criterion of all value, must be valuable in itself and its valuableness must not be capable of expression in terms of some other value.

For example, if God is conceived as the absolute good because He supremely fills the needs of men, then quite clearly the ultimate value is not located in deity, but in man. In order to avoid contradiction, the statement of our knowledge of God must be sui generis, beyond statement in terms of whatever knowledge we may possess in other areas.[1]

For all three men, this situation, in combination with the formal weaknesses of traditional religious epistemology, led to the separating of religious knowledge from descriptive or "theoretic" knowledge. Such separation is the valid precondition of Ritschl's value-judgment, it is the key to James's conviction of the right to believe beyond verification, and it is the starting-point of Niebuhr's contention that theology must be resolutely confessional. In all three there is present the bold assertion that the basic truth of religion is grounded apart from our causal knowledge of things. Furthermore, each has affirmed that this further realm of knowledge is constituted by an act of judgment, beyond verification, which asserts for itself its own truth without prior ground.[2] "Judgment" is, perhaps, an unfortunate term, for the religious affirmation is no weighing or measuring of value but is the commitment to that which becomes the standard of all value. In this sense, religious knowledge depends on nothing, but is itself that on which all value hangs, and the separation of knowledge into "theoretic" and "religious" is complete.

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[1] It can be argued justifiably that the preceding paragraphs rely far more heavily on Niebuhr than on Ritschl or James. While this is true as far as the explicit statements of each author are concerned, this chapter does not propose to review each of the arguments: our concern here is with the broad stream including the three men. If this is the case, the contention concerning the locus of value is to this author the most interesting and persuasive of the preliminary arguments. Is it not at least the implicit framework of Ritschl's conclusion that spirit is impossible for reason (cf. supra, p.34)? Does it not form the same argument as James's universe of one rock and two loving souls (cf. supra, pp. 105-106)? Whatever the precise statement, the argument runs throughout the three men: the integrity of religious knowledge is lost when that knowledge is described in terms which find their origin outside the religious situation. While such external description may be interesting, and useful upon occasion, if it is the sum of our religious knowledge then the object of religious experience is lost.

PROBLEMS OF COMMITMENT

If "commitment" may be employed as a term intended to represent the broad concept of religious knowledge in Ritschl, James and Niebuhr, a preliminary question may be phrased as follows: does commitment give what may be properly called "knowledge"? This, of course, has been the point at which all three men have been severely attacked. In one sense at least, such attacks proceed from a basic misunderstanding. If the areas of religious and theoretic knowledge are strictly separate, and if commitment is the sole method in the religious sphere, then the name by which the results are called is of no importance. The criticism that commitment is mere prejudice or subjective opinion is valid only when another, more reliable method of gaining information is available.[3] So long as the separation of religious and theoretic knowledge is forcefully clear, the results of commitment may be called by any name at all. The term "knowledge" causes difficulty only where it implies a positive relationship between the theoretic and the religious.

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[2] The careful student of James might contend that in James's own mind there was a prior ground which set limits to the will to believe, viz., the satisfying. While this may be true of one side of James's writing, it would seem to be opposed by those passages of the Varieties which refer to the sense of being greater than the self. In any case, such limitation does not seem necessarily required by the theory of the will to believe.

The Separation of Religious and Theoretic Knowledge: This raises the more serious question of the precise quality of the separation of religious and theoretic knowledge intended by the three men. The analyses in Chapters II, III, and IV have indicated that each man, having insisted on the separation of the two types of knowledge, began to compromise that separation in the hope of "validating" religious knowledge in terms of secular knowledge. Ritschl's final theory of religion,[4] enabled him to justify his commitment to the Christian God. For James, the "reconstructable" character of the truths of the will to believe demonstrates an ultimate reliance on empirical verification which makes religious truths merely justifiably cherished hypotheses. H. Richard Niebuhr's occasional references to the "progressive validation" of revelation severely compromise his earlier description of the nature of faith and revelation. Although for each man the full separation of religious and theoretic knowledge played an important role in his criticism of traditional religious epistemology and formed a part of his theory of religious faith, in the working out of that theory each man qualified that separation into what must ultimately become the subordination of religious faith to theoretic knowledge.

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[3] This is, of course, the heart of James's conviction that man has the right to believe beyond verification.

[4] God is a necessary postulate to insure spirit against nature.

One of the major points which this concluding chapter would seek to make is that if religious knowledge is to be separated from "theoretic" knowledge, the separation must be complete and final. Whether such a separation is prudent is another question. But, if it is seen as desirable in one point of an epistemological argument, it must be maintained throughout. If these are not seen as two, distinct kinds of knowledge, if religious knowledge is presented as merely an advance beyond the reaches of the present data of theoretic knowledge, if the techniques of theoretic knowledge stand as a final check on the truths of religious knowledge, — then religious knowledge has no ultimate integrity at all and is, in the last analysis, equivalent to hypotheses awaiting verification. One has then returned to the now-familiar dilemma of traditional apologetics, namely, how to ground knowledge of an ultimate reality on a base seen as logically prior to that reality. One has returned to the contradiction which Ritschl, James and Niebuhr sought to remove by the separation of the religious and the theoretic. It would seem apparent that if such a circle is to be avoided the separation, if made, must be full and distinct, without possibility of reunion.

The remainder of this chapter does not propose to press the merits of such a separation beyond the arguments already presented by the three authors. It is an interesting position which solves many problems. However, if the separation of religious and theoretic knowledge is adopted, and if some sort of theory of commitment is proposed as descriptive of religious knowledge, then at least one important consequence and two major issues would seem to arise. Their analysis will occupy the remaining pages of this chapter.

Relativism: The outstanding characteristic of a theory of commitment is its radically personal ground: the truths of commitment rest on the commitment itself. That is, if the full separation of religious and theoretic knowledge is maintained, there is no further ground for the truth of a religious affirmation, there is no place for that affirmation to "go" for a check on its validity; it is its own check and the source of its own truth. In this sense it stands alone or, more accurately, it stands with the man who has affirmed it.

If this is the case with religious knowledge, the central corollary of the nature of commitment would seem to be the vanity of all efforts to proceed beyond faith to an underlying ground conceived as fitted to establish the universal validity of one commitment or another. If the separation of religious and theoretic knowledge is truly complete, and if the ground of religious affirmation is the person himself, then a full relativism must prevail in theological thought and all ultimate discord must have to do with "differences" and not with "truth." The key to any non-relativist theology is the location somewhere of a universal standard of truth — a standard which evaporates if the sole method of religious knowledge is radically personal commitment and if religious knowledge is fully divorced from theoretic.

The terrifying specter of theological relativism can be exorcised when the original separation of religious and theoretic knowledge is held constant. The traditional alarm that relativism makes all things true presupposes a standard which can distinguish, universally and impersonally, the false from the true. We may ask wherein the truth of this standard of truth is located. If the retreat back to theoretic knowledge is avoided, all such statements of standards of truth are clearly seen as forceful commitments whose sole ground is their own affirmation and whose only weakness is the pretension that that affirmation is universal. If "standards of religious truth" are themselves radically personal commitments of religious knowledge, then the effort to locate false commitments has no logical consistency, although undeniably a certain historical power.

There is no question but that such a relativism severely curtails the claims of traditional theology. But it is false to say that the position eliminates all truth and makes theology meaningless. To be sure, the meaning of truth is somewhat changed: if no longer universal, the religious truth of commitment is now absolute.[5] Men continue to live and die for that which they can only affirm. If the claim to universality is removed, does this make a religious faith any the less absolute? In daily life does the fact that a particular person, good, or god is not cherished by all make it any the less lovable to its servant? To be sure, he may feel that it *ought* to receive universal acclaim, but is this feeling an integral part of his own adoration? If not, his faith that "This is God" is true for him, and the ground of its truth is not its public character.

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[5] *Cf.* Karl Jaspers, *The Perennial Scope of Philosophy*, p. 4: "On the one hand we have a truth that suffers by retraction, and on the other a truth which retraction leaves intact..... A truth by which I live stands only if I become identical with it; it is historical in form; as an objective statement it is not universally valid, but it is absolute. A truth which I can prove stands without me; it is universally valid, unhistorical, timeless, but not absolute; rather it depends on finite premises and methods of attaining knowledge of the finite. It

Although the separation of religious and theoretic knowledge must lead to relativism, this need not mean a total anarchy of commitments. Insofar as men possess common commitments a communal discourse is open to them. The Christian community, for example, can quarrel meaningfully within its own ranks because it shares a common faith. The tensions become unmanageable only when there is introduced an argument which finds its ground beyond that faith. Indeed, *ad hoc* discourse is possible among men with ultimately rival commitments, so long as the special area of discourse and action is similarly approached, albeit from different perspectives. For example, it is conceivable that in principle at least, a non-Christian and a Christian might cooperate in pressing for a specific item of labor reform legislation. To be sure, there is an ultimate divergence of orientation — indeed, there may even be a divergence of purpose in the special area of action: for the one it may be a battle in the economically determined class warfare, for the

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would be unfitting to die for a truth that is susceptible to proof."

other a phrase from the Social Gospel — but on this matter of special legislation a common discourse and action would seem possible. It is only as the area of discourse widens that the divergence of ultimate perspectives takes hold. In final perspective, rival faiths do rival; to say that they do not or should not implies that one has somehow gotten out of his faith to a faith which transcends all others. But, and it is at this point that Richard Niebuhr's analysis is most instructive, any appeal from one faith to another implies a standard beyond faith, and is consequently meaningless, if the two types of knowledge remain separate. The only legitimate inter-communal discourse is that which is confessional in character, finding its source in the enthusiasm of absolute personal commitment, but failing to authenticate that commitment by appeal to a higher court. If not total anarchy, there is at least a pluralism of faith — and that genuine pluralism must be sustained if the separation of religious and theoretic knowledge is to be maintained. The sum would seem to be that religious knowledge, while not universal, may be the communal apprehension of absolute truth, grounded only in itself but sufficient for man.

The Content of Faith: While some personal conviction may be apparent in the argument of the preceding paragraphs, the reader will find none in the few remaining pages of this chapter. The author has been greatly persuaded by much of the theme marked out by Ritschl, James and Niebuhr, yet there are at least two major problems which none of the authors appears to treat at length and which seem to this writer to be major, if not insurmountable, problems for the theory. Both follow from the original separation of religious and theoretic knowledge.

Except for Ritschl's one brief departure,[6] all three authors maintained that the object of religious and theoretic knowledge is one. Both forms of knowledge deal with the world of experience, they are merely two different ways of knowing that world — ways that cannot be correlated into one, higher method of knowing. In Niebuhr's phrase, "there is a descriptive and there is a normative knowledge of history and neither type is reducible to the terms of the other."

The question we would raise concerning such a description is, does this permit religious knowledge to have any content at all? If religious faith is fully separate from whatever theoretic knowledge we might have, that is, if commitment has no pretensions to causal knowledge, can it have any content whatever? To be sure, if the will to believe be interpreted as a theory justifying the formation of temporarily unverified hypotheses, then religious knowledge does have content. But we have seen that in this interpretation James's view is an inadequate description of the religious situation and results in the subordination of religious to theoretic knowledge.

If faith is rigorously distinguished from belief, does faith have content? Now, faith may be described as the "attitude" we take toward a given object, the normative judgments we make about it. But does that attitude, do those normative judgments have meaning until they are translated into statements of belief, until they become descriptive judgments? Does not every normative judgment imply hidden descriptive judgments? Is belief not an integral part of the faith attitude? This is to ask whether a full separation of religious and theoretic knowledge is truly possible.

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[6] Cf. supra, pp. 28-30.

Change of Faith: It may be replied that religious and theoretic knowledge are yet separate, if belief is considered as the human attempt to make explicit an implicit faith. Failures of particular beliefs, then, do not demonstrate the inadequacy of the implicit faith but only errors in its expression. The failure of a rain dance does not testify so much to the impotence of the rain god as it does to the imperfection of human expression.

While this may be a consistent reply, is it an adequate description of the human situation? We do, as a matter of fact, occasionally change our faith in accordance with the success of our beliefs. But if this change is taken as merely a fallacious human defensiveness, the question may be put more broadly: if religious and theoretic knowledge are truly separate, and if commitment is ungrounded personal affirmation, how does change of faith occur at all? What, indeed, is the origin of faith?

This is the question which Niebuhr sought to answer by reference to the polytheistic character of men.[7] If men live with a multiplicity of revelations, if "sometimes they live for Jesus' God, sometimes for country and sometimes for Yale," then a change of faith is readily explicable in terms of a shift in attention from one "god" to another. Yet, does not such a shift imply a further standard which compels the shift, *i. e.*, must not the man with multiple faiths have a prior faith which dictates the time and direction of changes in particular faiths? If so, the view might account for the majority of "conversions," explaining them as the relocation of trust in terms of an ultimate standard, but it is not capable of describing the situation when that ultimate standard is called into question. If religious knowledge is truly *sui generis*, how can it be called into question at all? Again the implication is that the separation of religious and theoretic knowledge cannot be complete.

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[7] Cf. supra, pp. 191-192.

SUMMARY

The heart of the movement represented by Ritschl, James and Niebuhr is the thesis that the religious situation provides men with a viable way of knowing, distinct from whatever other methods they may possess. This thesis was the result of their critique of traditional religious epistemology and formed the basis for the assertion of their theories of the value-judgment, of the will to believe, and of revelation. For each of the theories, the full separation of religious and theoretic knowledge is presuppositional. It has been argued in this chapter that such a separation also involves each theory in a full theological relativism.

Yet each man apparently felt compelled to compromise such a radical separation. Ritschl subordinated the value-judgment to an apologetic designed to establish the superiority of Christianity. On close examination, James may never have freed the will to believe from ultimate empirical verification. Niebuhr has compromised his relativism in an effort to identify "idolatry." In some degree, each of the men sought a further ground which would confirm religious affirmation; 6 not one has been completely willing to rest with the affirmation alone. While this is quite understandable, it is indeed unfortunate. Such a compromise either introduces a severe contradiction in the methodology of the general approach, or else it calls into serious question the validity of the approach altogether. As set out, the full integrity of the value-judgment, the will to believe, commitment, is directly related to the independence of religious knowledge. To hesitate at the picture of a fully separate body of religious knowledge is one thing; to compromise the integrity of that knowledge by tampering with its independence, and thus subverting the entire method of approach, is quite another.

This author has no pretensions to a profound resolution of the problems. On the one hand, the entire approach seems to fail if the separation of religious knowledge is not sustained throughout; on the other hand, if that separation is maintained, the content and relocation of faith are extremely difficult issues. We cannot help but ask whether a faith, if fully distinct from theoretic statements, can have genuine content. Secondly, does the entire analysis permit a description of a genuine change of commitment? We feel that these two questions must be answered — but, if the entire position is not to fail, they must be answered in a manner which does not reintroduce the elements of the dilemma of traditional epistemology. At the very least, these are serious problems. But they should stand as challenges rather than roadblocks for there is too much of value in that broad movement which includes the theories of Ritschl, James and Niebuhr. It represents a firm departure from the contradictory defensiveness of traditional apologetics; it frees theology from the need to prove a deity who is no god. In describing religious knowledge as valuational, in making religious truth absolute if not universal, it restores the personal character of the communication between God and man. In many ways, it is a brilliant description of the religious situation. But such a theory must be consistent; it may not affirm and then deny. As a movement in religious epistemology it must find spokesmen who will stand with its primary assertion and meet the inevitable issues without retreat.

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